CHASTE AS ICE PURE AS SNOW

DESPARD

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CHASTE AS ICE, PURE AS SNOW.

A NOVEL.

BY

MRS. M. C. DESPARD.

Ham. If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny.

HAMLET, Act III. Scene 1

PHILADELPHIA:
PORTER & COATES.

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CHASTE AS ICE, PURE AS SNOW.

PART I.

A WOMAN FACE TO FACE WITH THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

A PICTURE AND A FACE.

> There was a woman, beautiful as morning,
> Sitting beneath the rocks upon the sand
> Of the waste sea—fair as one flower adorning
> An icy wilderness—each delicate hand
> Lay crossed upon her bosom, and the band
> Of her dark hair had fallen, and so she sat
> Looking upon the waves.

LONDON and May. What visions of gayety and beauty, of life and brightness, the conjunction of those two words brings before the mind! London in May, when, as it might almost seem, the first gleam of sunshine had called forth, from the essential nothing of obscurity, gay flutterers of a million colored hues, to spread their wings and float joyously in an atmosphere of hope.

For, let who will speak of the balmy breezes and deep azure skies of the children of the South, there are some who would maintain that in the resurrection of the fashionable corners of England's great city from their winter sleep, in the sometimes keen wind that rouses the island spirit of opposition and braces the nerves of the idlers, even in the rapid changes that pass over the sky, there is more exhilaration, more strong incitement to courage and hope, than in the full flush of radiant summer which May often brings in climes held to be more highly favored by Nature.

London, in May, when the streets are filled with gay equipages, whose prancing steeds seem to rejoice in the dignity of their position, taking a part in the great saturnalia of rank and fashion—when the dresses of the ladies are only eclipsed by the brilliancy of the shop-windows which they daily haunt—when the artist and musician bring forth their choicest wares to delight the senses and gratify the perceptions of the great and the little who throng busy London in this fairest season of the year.

It was in London, then, and the month was May. So much being said, little more description is needful: like bold divers, we must leave the coast, and plunge at once into the great sea of humanity, drawing thence, it may be, a pearl which but for our efforts had remained there still. For all this humanity, which our vast London so fitly represents, is composed of individuals; each individual has a separate tale to tell, though all have not the voice to tell it; and in the tale of the hidden life there is sometimes a beauty and pathos, a dignity and wonder, that the dramatist and poet might do well to seize. But it is seldom that they are caught and transferred. Beside the hidden tragedies and heartrending emotions of the everyday life of humanity these transcripts are often pale and colorless—a body that waits for the breath of life to kindle it into beauty.

It was early in the afternoon of a bright May day. Even for that season London seemed unusually crowded. In Regent street the difficulty was to move forward at all, and in Pall Mall and the Strand matters were not much better. Woe to the unlucky foreigners or country cousins who found crossing the street an absolute necessity! They might have been seen generally at the most crowded spots, shivering on the brink of what for the moment was worse than the vague, shadowy Jordan of the pilgrims, and too often submitting ignominiously to the guidance of that being almost superhuman in his callous indifference to rattling wheels and horses' heads—the policeman.

But in and about a certain corner of Charing Cross the crowd seemed to culminate. To tell of the pedestrians of every shade and hue, the carriages, the omnibuses, which kept up a constant stream in this direction, would take volumes, for the Exhibition of the Royal Academy had only been open a week, and had not, therefore, lost the first charm of novelty.

Thither many were hastening, mostly ladies of the fashionable class, gayly dressed in all the freshness of early summer coloring. But those who thronged to the Royal Academy on this May afternoon were not all of the fashionable class; there were besides some who went from a true love of art, a patient thirst for the beautiful—pale students, whose eyes had long grown used to dusky streets, and to whom the yearly vision of the something that always lies beyond was a revelation and a power; governesses and female artisans who had taken a holiday for the express purpose of enjoying the image of that which hard reality had denied to them. Many of these were shabbily dressed, and pallid from the wasting effects of hard work and care; they enjoyed, however, more perhaps than their brilliant sisters, who could glibly criticise this style and that, with the true art-jargon and an appearance of intimate knowledge, but to whom this, that charmed those others, was only a matter of course, a somewhat tiresome routine, that must of necessity be performed as a part of the season's work.

On a corner of a seat in a central hall one seemingly of this latter class had found a place. She could not certainly have belonged to the fashionable world, for her scanty black dress was made with no pretension to style, and she wore a close bonnet, from under which a plain white border, that resembled a widow's cap, was peeping. There was one detail, however, in her dress that drew the attention of some who passed her. She wore, fastened gracefully round her shoulders in rather a foreign style, a silk Indian scarf of the richest coloring and workmanship. It harmonized strangely with the rest of her dress and her general appearance, but it was not unbecoming. Those who, attracted by this incongruity, looked at her attentively, saw a face that was almost startling in its pure beauty of outline, and a form whose refined grace did not require the assistance of the toilet to add to its charms.

"That woman could wear anything," was the reflection of one or two who glanced at her in passing.

She knew nothing of their criticism. Hour after hour passed away, and still she remained in the same place—a solitude to her, peopled by the multitude of thoughts to which the sight of one small picture had given rise. And that picture was, to many of those who had admired her in their rapid transit from one flower of art to another, a very commonplace affair. We see with such different eyes, for is not the perception of beauty a birthright of spirit? Where soul illumines there beauty lies, but only for the soul that sees.

Her eyes saw the picture, and her *spirit* saw beyond it. Hence the beauty that drew and enchained her. Besides, the picture had a history. From her own consciousness she translated its meaning.

Probably few will remember the picture, for it did not write its name on the art-history of the period, and its author is unknown to fame; but it certainly possessed power. Perhaps it was one of those flashes thrown off in the fire of youth by what might have been a grand genius if it had not been swamped in the great ocean of modern realism, thus losing for ever the divine breath of imaginative power. The picture was small. In its quiet corner it lived its life unnoticed by the crowd.

This is what it represented. In the background a sea just tinged with the gold of sunset, and skirting it a barren, rocky shore; on the shore a woman in an attitude of eager, waiting expectation; in the far distance a sail that has gathered on its whiteness some of the bright evening coloring; overhead a deepening sky, in which faint stars seem to be struggling into sight. The woman's face is traced sharply against the sky. It is beautiful, the blessed dawning of a new-born hope seeming to glimmer faintly from the deep horrors of a past despair. She leans over a projecting ledge of rock, not heeding in her rapt eagerness the sharp point that seems to pierce her tender hand, only gazing, as if her soul were in her eye, at the white point in the distance, which holds, as she imagines, the object of her hope.

There were pictures in the close neighborhood of this one that, to the art-critic, possessed far greater claims to admiration, but the woman with the shabby dress saw none of them. She sat on her crimson-covered seat, her hands folded and her eyes fixed, looking at the one picture that had touched her; she looked at it until she saw it no longer; a film gathered over her eyes; the picture, the room, the crowds, all her surrounding, had vanished. She was living in the region of thought alone, busying herself with the problem which the picture had evoked.

And as she sat rooted to the one spot, herself a fairer picture than any which that roof covered, the afternoon waned away and the galleries thinned. The fashionable crowd were beginning to think of their dinner-toilet. The woman was left alone on her seat in the centre of one of the halls, a somewhat conspicuous object, for her singular style of dress and her strange beauty would have gained her observation anywhere.

It was at about this time that a young gentleman dressed in the height of fashion, with an eye-glass carefully adjusted in his right eye, strolled leisurely through the hall. He was evidently a very young man, one who had not yet been aroused from the delusion so pleasing while it lasts of his own vast superiority to—almost everything; it is scarcely necessary to particularize—his own sex, with perhaps a few exceptions, certainly all women and lesser creatures. His walk revealed this small weakness to any one who chose to take the trouble of observing him closely and the carriage of his head, which was held very erect, the chin being slightly elevated.

He held a catalogue in his hand, but he very seldom consulted it. To have compared the number of the picture with that of its description would have been, to use a pet phrase with young men, an awful bore. And an awful bore he seemed to find the whole affair as he walked through the picture-lined galleries, smothering a yawn from time to time. He was evidently looking out for some one who had appointed this place as a rendezvous, and as evidently he was rather more indignant than disappointed at not finding directly the object of his search.

At last, as it seemed, he had enough of it. Considering himself a sufficiently conspicuous object not to be lightly passed by by any who had once been favored with the honor of his acquaintance, he threw himself on one of the seats, fully determined to take no more trouble in the matter, but to leave the *dénouement* to fate.

There was one other on the seat he had chosen, but our young gentleman, in spite of his small vanities, was too truly a gentleman to honor the solitary woman who occupied it with that supercilious stare which, unconsciously to herself, had more than once been cast on her that day. In sheer idleness, and for want of something better to do, he looked rather attentively at the picture which faced him, and presently he too had fallen under its spell.

The beauty of the woman by the sea-shore, her sadness, her desolation, attracted him powerfully. Before many moments had passed he found himself tracing every line of her face and form, and dreaming out the tragedy which her face revealed.

He was awoke from his reverie by a faint sobbing sigh, and looking round he discovered that the woman who shared his seat was struggling with a faintness that seemed gradually to be overpowering her. Before he could rise to offer her assistance her head had fallen back upon the crimson cushion, the little close bonnet had dropped off, and the white face, in its chiselled beauty, lay stricken with a death-calm close to his shoulder.

CHAPTER II.

ADÉLE AND MARGARET.

In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.

Very young men are not, as a rule, passionate admirers of the fair sex. They like to be flattered and caressed by women, they delight in imaginary conquests, treating the sex generally with a sort of compassionate condescension. Their chief cultus is the *ego* that is to do and to dare such great things in the untried future.

There are some who cherish this pet delusion through life, who are always superior. Should such have women dependent upon them the fate of those women is scarcely enviable. They are expected to walk through life inferior. But in the lives of most men there is an awakening. Sometimes the favorite pursuit—science, art, literature—rising gradually into vaster proportions as it is more ardently followed, dwarfs the man in his own estimation by contrast with what he seeks. The ideal being ever so far in advance, he begins to take a truer estimate of his powers and to try to enlarge them. Sometimes it is the world of life, contact with other minds and the feeling of their superiority; sometimes it is the world of nature, its beauty and its mystery. These are the majority.

To a few perhaps—a very few—the awakening comes from another power. It *is* a power, whatever may be said to the contrary, a great power for good or for evil—the power of beauty, as it rests brooding on God's last and fairest gift to man—woman.

The mind, the imagination, the heart, all that had lain hidden under the crust of self-seeking, rises into play in a moment, and the man is changed. Such a man can never despise woman, for the one particular star—distant, unattainable in all probability—sheds its lustre upon all that partake of its nature.

If the woman who has gained this power can only use it, not selfishly, but grandly, truly, the change for the man is a resurrection into new life. If not— Who shall say how many young souls have been ruined, perhaps for ever, by this same "if not"?

To return to the May afternoon and the scene in the picture-gallery. If any painter had been near he could scarcely have chosen a more powerful subject. The young man who had first discovered the fainting woman did not consider himself a very emotional person, but for a moment he was absolutely staggered. He had risen hastily to his feet and stooped over her unconsciously. There he remained, helpless as a child in the presence of a mystery it is unable to solve. It was only for a moment that the stupor held him; then, with a feeling that was very strange and new, he summoned courage to raise her head upon his arm, and with trembling fingers to loosen her scarf and bonnet-strings.

What was to be done next? Water, smelling-salts, a fan—he had not one of these appliances to restore her, and he shrank painfully from gathering a crowd by asking assistance; for as yet the back of the seat had hidden her from the very few who were still walking through the galleries, those few being mostly lovers of art, and too much absorbed in the pictures to have ears or eyes for anything beyond them.

If he could only manage the matter alone! and rapidly the various modes of treating fainting-fits passed through his mind. He lifted the beautiful head and laid it down upon the seat, raising her feet to the same level; then, kneeling beside her, he opened her white fingers and rubbed the palms of her hands, watching eagerly for a sign of life. But it would not do: the dark eyelashes rested still on the pale, calm face, no quivering of the eyelids showed dawning consciousness. If he could have imparted to her some of his own exuberant life—for the warm blood was throbbing and tingling through his veins till his very finger-tips seemed instinct with consciousness—he would have stooped and breathed into her lips; but he dared not: there was a majesty in her helpless beauty that only a very coarse mind could have resisted.

It takes long to relate, but in reality only a few moments had passed from the time of the woman's first faintness to the instant when the young man, finding his efforts fruitless, turned with a sigh to seek assistance from any lady who might be passing through the gallery. The first face that greeted him was one he knew. It was that of a young girl, very bright and pleasant in appearance, decked out in the brilliancy of light muslin and fluttering ribbons. She saw him instantly, and went smilingly across the room with extended hand. "Oh, Arthur, you naughty boy!" she began, but catching sight of the fainting woman, she broke off hastily: "Some one in a faint? Heavens! what a lovely face! Poor thing! it is the heat. Go off quickly and get some water, Arthur; I should think you could get it at the door: you boys are such helpless beings."

She was down on her knees as she spoke, fluttering her fan gently and applying her smelling-salts; but her volubility had already collected in a little crowd the few people who remained in the galleries. She put them off with pretty gestures and ready wit: "My friend wants air; I assure you it is only a fainting-fit—nothing to alarm."

But she was relieved when Arthur's appearance with the water put the lookers-on to a sudden flight, and they were once more left to themselves.

"Oh, Arthur," said the young girl earnestly, "how beautiful she is! I *must* give her a little kiss before she awakes, as she will, I am sure, with the water. There, there, my beauty!" for the kiss seemed to be the most effectual remedy. Her eyelids quivered, causing thereby such excitement to Arthur that part of the contents of the glass of water he held fell over her feet, and Adèle—for that was the name of the young lady who had given such timely assistance—told him with mock indignation to go off, and not come again till he was called. Without a word Arthur turned away. He would scarcely have been so obedient the day before, but the incident of that afternoon seemed to have robbed him of his power. He stood in the entrance of the hall, watching until he should be sent for by the ladies.

For the first time in his life Arthur wished he had been a girl. His thoughts, to tell the truth, were rapidly becoming very sentimental. Adèle, happy Adèle! he thought of her with a new respect. She could carry on these gentle ministries impossible to the rougher hands of men. With what tenderness and skill she had used her remedies! And then the kiss! Yes, women, after all, possessed certain advantages. And her first look would be for Adèle. If he had been more expert, it might have been for him. Had any one told Arthur, even an hour before, that he could ever have been jealous of his cousin, he would certainly have scorned the idea: he had always considered himself so vastly superior to women in general, and his pretty little playmate in particular. He had not much time, however, to indulge in these bril liantly novel ideas, for before many moments had passed Adèle appeared. "You may offer her your arm," she said. "I want to get her out of this place as quickly as possible."

"Have you found out anything about her?"

"Only that her name is Margaret Grey. A letter dropped out of her pocket, and I saw the signature, or rather she pointed it out to me as I handed it back to her. I fancy she is a widow, though she has not actually told me so. She is staying in lodgings at some distance. Poor thing! I am afraid she is very poor."

Adèle's pretty face was clouded as she spoke, but she said no more, for they were very near the spot where Margaret had been left.

"Margaret!" thought Arthur, "Margaret!" and the one word seemed to cling about his brain like a sweet, indefinable music as awkwardly enough, it must be confessed, he approached her to offer his arm.

She rose when she saw him, a slight blush on her cheek, but as she looked up at his frank young face the blush faded and her composure returned.

"I have to thank you for great kindness, sir," she said with a gentle dignity. "I cannot think what came over me just now. It must have been the heat of the place; but I feel much stronger now, and if you will add to your goodness the further favor of giving me your arm for the length of the galleries, I can find my way home without any more assistance."

Her voice was almost as overpowering to Arthur as her face had been. He tried to stammer out a reply, when Adèle came happily to his assistance. Taking one of the lady's hands in her own, she said with gentle earnestness, "Pray allow me to manage for you. My cousin will tell you how much I like to arrange everything for my neighbors; it is my pet weakness. Then, you know, you are my patient, and I expect you to be obedient. Mamma has sent the carriage for me, for she was not quite certain that I should meet Arthur. We can drive you to any point you like to mention. Please do not deny me this pleasure."

The lady blushed again, but Adèle's gentle delicacy triumphed. She bowed her head in acquiescence, and took

Arthur's arm, leaning on it somewhat heavily, for she was still weak. Adèle walked on her other side, slightly supporting her from time to time; and so they passed through the gallery, with not many thoughts for the pictures, just as the daylight was beginning to wane.

"——— street, Islington," said Arthur to the stately coachman when, having at last emerged from the galleries, the trio stood beside a small, well-appointed carriage.

The coachman looked dignifiedly astonished. He took note of an exceedingly shabby person who was evidently connected with this strange fancy. Had his young lady been alone, he might have respectfully demurred; but as Mr. Arthur was a trusted person in the establishment—one, moreover, whom it was not safe to offend—he hazarded no remark, and after one protest in the shape of repetition, in an inquiring key, of the obnoxious address, turned his horses' heads in this very unwonted direction.

He had to ask his way several times before he could find the out-of-the-way street indicated by Arthur's brief order; but for at least one of those inside the carriage the drive could not have been too long. Arthur Forrest would have found it extremely difficult to explain his feelings, even to himself. Happily, for the moment it was not necessary. To analyze our enjoyment or its sources would be very often to rob it of its charm.

Why is the transparent greenness of spring or its first balmy breeze so delicious to the senses? Why does a certain melody echo and re-echo in the brain with a sweetness we cannot fathom? Why does beauty—pure outline, graceful form, rich coloring—awaken a thrill of gladness in our being? We cannot tell. We can only rejoice that such things are.

And Arthur was very young, full of the freshness of youth and inexperience. He would have been highly indignant could he have heard such a remark applied to him, for he looked upon himself as a man of the world whom it would be difficult to astonish in any way; but nevertheless it was true. The very novelty of his sensations as he sat on the back seat of the brougham, looking anywhere rather than in the fair face before him, proved this.

It was well for him that the vision came when it did, when his heart was young and his life vigorous, when the chivalry of youth had not passed away, with other beautiful things, in the numbing surroundings of a fashionable life.

At last the carriage stopped at the entrance of a dingy street in a region where "apartments" looked out from almost every window. The lady would not suffer her new friends to take her to her own door, and they possessed sufficient refinement of feeling to refrain from pressing the point. She seemed even to shrink from the prospect of any further acquaintance.

"We live in different worlds," she said with a sad smile when Adèle, in her girlish enthusiasm, pressed her to allow them at least to inquire after her. For Adèle was almost as much in love as her cousin, certainly more gushingly so; but there was no possibility of resisting the quiet firmness with which all efforts after further intimacy were set aside by the lady they had helped.

With warm thanks she bade them farewell, but they both noticed, with youth's sympathetic insight, that her eyelids drooped as though she had been weary, and her lips slightly quivered before she turned away.

Adèle's eyes filled with tears, and Arthur had to swallow a most uncomfortable lump that seemed to impede his utterance. Then the cousins became more sympathetic than they had ever been before in discussing their adventure and forming theory after theory about the mysterious stranger.

But Adèle was the talker, Arthur the listener, and perhaps his cousin's conversation had never before been so much to his mind.

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN FACE TO FACE WITH THE WORLD.

How tedious, false, and cold seem all things! I
Have met with much injustice in this world.

Choking back the tears that seemed as if they *would* well forth from a fountain that had long been sealed, Margaret Grey turned from her companions of an hour to go home.

To a very desolate home in truth. Walled in and bricked out from the fair sights and sounds of Nature, even the sunbeams as they touched it seemed only to reveal its dinginess.

But four walls cannot make a home, any more than a casket can enrich its jewelled contents. The most desolate exterior may be endeared by what it holds. It might be so with Margaret's home, yet no light came into her pale face as she caught sight of her dwelling. For a moment she even hesitated—it seemed bitter to meet its dull blankness—only a moment; then with a half smile at her own weakness she walked languidly up a few dirty steps and rang the bell.

It was answered by a servant in keeping with the steps, and passing her by, Margaret went into her rooms. They consisted of a bed- and sitting-room, separated by folding doors. The sitting-room was very much what the exterior of the house had promised—very dull, very shabby. A cracked mirror was over the chimney-piece, its frame carefully veiled by yellow muslin that had lost its primal brightness. A chandelier in the centre of the room was also enveloped with the same dingy covering. A few shells and gay china ornaments were scattered about on unsteady stands. On a table beside the window was a group of dusty-looking paper flowers.

Tea was laid, the one cup and saucer telling their pathetic tale of a lonely life. Margaret had left her lodgings that morning, desperate with the feeling that either her eyes and her senses must have some relief or her mind must give way. When she returned and looked round her once more, she began to fear that her experiment had been worse than useless. The force of contrast had increased the bitterness of her lot.

She sank wearily into a stiff pretence of an arm-chair, and began again thinking out the problem that beauty and dreariness alike presented to her mind—the uncertain future. And then came over her like a flood the vision of days and years without hope, without joy. Burying her face in her hands, she gave way for a few moments to unrestrained weeping. It was an unwonted exercise, for Margaret was brave, and none of the last and deepest bitterness, that of remorse, cast its shadow on her retrospect of the past. Thoughtless she might have been, sinning she was not: of this thing the secret court of her inner consciousness, so pitiless to the true offender, had freely acquitted her.

It would be a long story to tell what it was that overcame Margaret Grey till she sobbed out her sadness alone in the stillness of the May evening. Partly, perhaps, the squalor of her present surroundings, for the beautiful face and form encased a soul attuned to highest harmonies; partly the sweet womanly sympathy, which she had looked upon only and then put resolutely away from her; partly the daily pinpricks of disappointment and repulse that she had encountered in prosecuting the business which had led her to London. For, like a multitude of helpless women, Margaret was on the look-out for employment.

She had one little girl, a child about six years of age. With such a sweet tie children-lovers might wonder at her utter desolation. Strange to say, this tie, so sweet to many, was to her more of a care than a pleasure. The future of her little one weighed heavily on her mind.

In the lonely seaside village where she had left her it would be scarcely possible to educate her to fill the position that might be hers in the future. Margaret's scanty means did not allow her to think of a residence in town, or of the expenses of a school education for her daughter, unless, indeed, she could earn the necessary money.

Hence her visit to London. She had been well educated herself; of course her first thought was that by educating others she could pay for the education of her child. If she had loved her little one very much, perhaps she would have judged differently. She might have thought it better to make a home for her child in any spot, however lonely, feeling that the lack of some accomplishment would be well compensated by the refining influence of a mother's constant love and care.

But Margaret did *not* love her child so deeply as to find her presence a sweet necessity. There was a cloud over her motherhood, which robbed it of some of its fair charm. Duty to her child, not pleasure in her, was her one idea of the tie that alone, at this period of her history, bound her to life. It was *this* made her anxiety that, whatever her own lot might be, Laura should have every advantage in the way of education and training. And with the anxiety came the need for exertion. Up to the moment when the child's growth and development made the mother think of that bugbear of mothers—her education—Margaret had not been troubled with any money difficulties. She had lived in her retirement, the one trouble of her life wrapping her in its gloomy folds, but with no care for the provision of herself and her child in the future. Suddenly, inexplicably, one source of income had failed. Margaret had not been accustomed to trouble herself about money: the sufficient came to her—that was all she required to know—and this poverty was a new and dreadful thing which she found it very difficult to realize.

She tried to fathom the mystery, but it eluded her; only this remained as a hard fact: eighty pounds a year was all she received or seemed likely to receive, and Laura had to be educated.

The spirit of self-sacrifice is strong in some women; it was very strong in Margaret. She had loved her solitude by the great sea, and had succeeded in making it almost pleasant. There she pondered and wept and hoped; there, if anywhere, she thought that her trial must end. She would not enter the great world, to be swamped and lost in its multitude. Hiding her loss where none could know and none would blame, she would live in the midst of a savage loneliness which seemed almost sympathetic to her mood.

This suited her, but would it do for Laura? Was she a fit companion for her child, already dreamy and imaginative beyond her years? No, Margaret told herself; and, leaving the little one in the care of the woman from whom she hired their little cottage, she went to London alone, to try and find some occupation for herself.

She had been directed to Islington as a cheap neighborhood; and there she had stayed in a wretched lodging-house for about three weeks—three ages to poor Margaret, filled with dismal memories of humiliation and disappointment. She was reviewing it all that evening—the rudeness, the repulses, the cruel cross-examinations; for with these came the fresher scenes which that day had brought—the chivalrous admiration that had shone out of Arthur's young eyes, the gentle, womanly tenderness of Adèle.

Employers—so it seemed to poor Margaret; they were a very new class to her—were cast in a different mould. It was their duty to ask disagreeable questions and to probe unhealed wounds; it was their duty to be stiff and cross and not at all impressed with the outward advantages which Margaret knew she possessed. It seemed very hopeless, but she felt it necessary to persevere, at least for a little while longer. The thought aroused her. She raised her head, and became suddenly conscious of the fact of hunger. She had not eaten a morsel since breakfast. No wonder, she thought, that faintness had overpowered her. So she went into her bedroom and washed away the traces of tears, that the dirty maid-of-all-work might not read her weakness, then rang the bell to order an egg or something a little more substantial than usual for her tea.

The girl came in, holding out a card that had not been improved, in point of coloring, by its transit through her fingers. She informed Margaret that a lady had left it half an hour ago with a message.

The message, not very lucidly delivered, was to the effect that the lady whose name appeared in minute letters on the card would, in all probability, call again in the course of the evening.

Poor Margaret! she looked at the card. "Mrs. Augustus Brown." It had not a very encouraging sound, but it might mean business, and business meant provision for Laura's needs. But the thought of the impending interview had robbed her of all appetite; so, after hastily swallowing a cup of tea with a dry biscuit, she again rang the bell, had the tea-apparatus cleared away, and then sat by the window trying to read.

The apparition of a yellow chariot which seemed to fill the narrow street interrupted her, and before many minutes a thundering rap at the door made her aware of the fact that the dreaded visitor was at hand. Margaret's cheek burned. For one moment she longed desperately for a refuge where she could hide her head from these intrusions, then she remembered that she had invited them, and strove to brace her nerves to endurance. When, therefore, the door was thrown open to its fullest extent by the servant, who, never having seen so grand a person in her life as Mrs. Augustus Brown, thought it necessary to give her plenty of room, Margaret was herself again—the heightened color the struggle had called forth alone testifying to her recent emotion.

Mrs. Augustus Brown was a little round individual, almost as broad as she was long, decked out in flounces and laces and ribbons: it was one of the chief trials of her life that none of these things made her look important. Mrs. Augustus Brown was governess-hunting, for she possessed no less than seven small likenesses of herself, who began to be unruly, and to require, as she would have expressed it, a stricter hand over them.

And this governess-hunting was by no means an uncongenial occupation to Mrs. Brown. It could not but be pleasing, especially as the yellow chariot and its attendant luxuries were of comparatively recent orgin, to dash up to registry-offices and through quiet streets, and to watch the effect produced on the untutored minds of inferior persons by her brilliant *tout ensemble.* But as yet she had not suited herself. In a governess, as she said, "tong" was essential; *her* children would have to be brought up suitably, that they might adorn the position Providence had evidently prepared for them, and "tong" seemed to be a rare article in the market of female labor.

On the previous day Mrs. Augustus had dilated very largely upon this point at a registry-office. She had been directed, in consequence, to Mrs. Grey—a prize, as she was assured, in point of appearance and manner. Curiosity was strong in Mrs. Brown. Certain allusions and hints about Mrs. Grey's antecedents attracted her, and she lost no time in looking her up; hence the apparition of the yellow chariot.

But Mrs. Augustus Brown has been left in the doorway to introduce herself to Mrs. Grey. As she entered Margaret rose, with the true instinct of a lady, and went forward to meet her, with a bow to which her visitor did not deign to respond.

Mrs. Augustus Brown flattered herself that she had tact enough to put people in their own places and keep them there—a notable piece of wisdom, truly; the only difficulty being as to certain doubts about what is the "own place." Were those rightly solved, perhaps a few fine ladies would be slightly astonished by finding a level at some unexpected layer of the social crust.

It was not Mrs. Brown's way to trouble herself with doubts. She waddled across the room with great satisfaction to herself, but in a manner that to the uninitiated could hardly have been called dignified, sank down on a chair which directly faced Margaret, and began divesting herself quietly of some of her wraps.

Never to appear too eager with any of these people was, in the code of Mrs. Augustus, an essential point in their management. When this business had been performed, and she had settled herself as comfortably as might be in a not very luxurious arm-chair, Mrs. Brown felt for a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses, adjusted them and looked Margaret over from head to foot. "Bless me, how handsome!" was her mental ejaculation: "my word for it, *she's* no good."

It was not wonderful that this coarse mind found it difficult to understand the strange anomaly, for Margaret was one of those rarely beautiful beings who seem only made for the tenderest handling. Her face might have been a poet's ideal, for the traces of suffering and conflict it only too plainly revealed had removed it far from the meaningless glory of mere form and coloring; and yet she was too young perhaps for these to have bereft her of any charm; they rather endowed her pale fair beauty with a certain refinement, an appealing pathos, which spoke powerfully to the imagination.

She possessed a form, too, whose every line was perfect, well developed, yet fragile—womanly, yet full of grace. And the deep crimson which Mrs. Brown's studied rudeness had called to her face heightened the effect of her beauty.

She sat before her visitor, her eyes cast down, her hands crossed in her lap, like a fair Greek slave in the barbarian's market-place, waiting for the decree of fate.

It was a relief when Mrs. Augustus Brown began to give her attention to the ponderous carriage-bag in her hand.

Some of its fastenings, being the latest patents and the height of convenience, were difficult to manage.

"Your name," she said, hunting for a letter—"ah, here it is!—*Mrs.* Grey."

Margaret bowed, shivering slightly. That fatal emphasis. This was the way in which the inquisitions generally began.

Mrs. Augustus here coughed slightly, and looked over her gold-rimmed spectacles in a way intended to be severe. Alas! how we deceive ourselves! The look was only comic. "A married woman, I presume?"

Margaret bowed again.

Here Mrs. Brown consulted a set of ivory tablets: "With one little girl, I am told, and small income, anxious to make enough for her education. Is this correct?"

"Perfectly so, madam."

"A very laudable object: then, Mrs. Grey, you are, I presume, a widow?"

There was a moment's hesitation. Margaret pressed her hand to her side as if she were in pain, and Mrs. Augustus eyed her suspiciously: "My question, Mrs. Grey, is a simple one."

"And my answer, madam, can be equally simple. I am *not* a widow."

"*Not* a widow!" Mrs. Brown drew back her chair and took another long look—one that expressed incredulous horror. "Not a widow! And pray, Mrs. Grey, where is your husband?"

In spite of herself, Margaret smiled feebly, but the smile was a nervous one. She looked up and shook her head: "I am sorry to say, madam, that I cannot tell."

"Then," and Mrs. Brown again receded, as if to put as much space as possible between herself and this naughty person—"then, Mrs. Grey, you are separated from your husband?"

"I am."

The answer was spoken in a low, clear voice, very calmly, but with a certain intonation of sadness that would have struck upon a more sensitive ear. To Mrs. Augustus Brown this very quietness of demeanor was in the highest degree brazen. She fluttered her fan, drew herself up to her full height, and looked virtuous as a Roman matron (in her own opinion, be it said parenthetically).

"You seem strangely forgetful, Mrs. Grey, of the importance of the position which you seek to fill in my household. With the utmost coolness you describe yourself as a woman living separated from her husband. Goodness knows why. For all I can tell, you may have done something very wrong.' Here Mrs. Brown coughed and hid an imaginary blush behind her fan. "And yet," she continued, when the blush had been given time to fade, "you wish to take the entire charge of little innocents, the eldest of whom is only ten, and seven of them. I had my children so quick." Here Mrs. Brown lost her thread. To mothers of large families these reminiscences are always bewildering.

Margaret's eyes were looking very weary; she filled up the pause: "Perhaps it would be better then to inquire no farther. From what you say I fear that I shall scarcely suit you." She rose as she spoke.

Mrs. Brown did not take the hint; she remained where she was, rooted to the place by sheer astonishment. For a young woman to make so light of such a position as that of governess in *her* family was an unheard-of thing. But Mrs. Grey rose in her estimation from that moment. Then she was curious. "Sit down again, my dear," she said in a manner that was intended to be gracious. "Mrs. Townley spoke highly of you, and you certainly *look* a respectable person. I'm not one always to blame my own sex. I believe in these affairs the men are very often in fault. You may not be aware that Mr. Augustus Brown and myself consider salary no object, and masters for every branch. Rudiments and style, Mrs. Grey, and of course character with children, you understand. If it were as my confidential maid, now, I might not be so particular; but, unfortunately, the young person I have I brought from Paris, and can't get rid of her under three months. Not half so handy as I was given to understand."

She fluttered her fan again, and waited for an answer. Margaret hesitated. Had she consulted her own inclinations she would have refused decidedly to have anything further to do with this vulgar woman. Already she felt by anticipation what the yoke of servitude in such a house as hers would be; but Laura—the high salary. The servitude, though bitter, might be shortened. It ended in a compromise. "Will you be kind enough to allow me a day or two's delay?" she asked. "I have friends who will certainly not refuse to give me the necessary references; but I have not seen many of them for some time, and they do not know of my present position."

Mrs. Augustus Brown got up, her dignity gone for the time in her anxiety to make this striking-looking person one of her household.

"Yes, yes," she said, "that's the best plan; I'm sick of looking up governesses—one more pasty-looking and unstylish than the other—and I fancy you'll suit. Let me hear soon, for the children get more headstrong every day. I'm too gentle with them. And then so much in society. Why, we have three engagements of an evening sometimes, turning night into day, *I* say. And the servants can no more manage them than fly. I shall lose my health, as I tell Mr. Brown, if I'm referred to every hour of the day by servants and children. Too great a strain, Mrs. Grey. Well, good-bye, my dear."

She waddled off to the yellow chariot, and Margaret was left alone—headstrong children, references, explanations, pictures and unexpected kindness making one great riot in her brain. She went to bed early that night, and the events of the day grouped themselves together into fantastic dreams.

In the brain of Mrs. Augustus Brown one thought was pre-eminent; it haunted her among the cream-colored cushions of the yellow chariot, was present in the drawing-room, slightly interfering with her mild contemplation of the sleeping face of a sandy-haired individual on the sofa; it followed her even to the marital couch, mingling with her dreams.

"She's mighty handsome: I hope to goodness Brown won't fall in love with her."

Brown was calmly unconscious of this want of conjugal trust. Had he known to what it bore reference, he might have been slightly excited, for Mr. Augustus, though his hair was sandy and his nose a decided snub, was an admirer of female beauty, and considered himself highly irresistible. Mrs. Brown was totally unaware of this fact.

"After years of life together" they were, on this point at least, "strangers yet."

Sentimental young ladies, who croon over these pathetic words, thinking perhaps, with an approach to soft melancholy, of the desolation reserved for themselves in the future, when, their finest feelings unappreciated, they must shut themselves up in mystery, might learn a lesson from Mr. and Mrs. Augustus.

To be "strangers yet" on some points with that nearest and dearest, the unappreciative husband of the future, may possibly be conducive to harmony rather than desolation.

CHAPTER IV.

MORNING THOUGHTS—A RESOLVE TAKEN.

Soul of our souls and safeguard of the world,
Sustain—Thou only canst—the sick of heart!
Restore their languid spirits, and recall
Their lost affections unto Thee and Thine.

MARGARET awoke early the next morning. It was a sad waking. For the first moment she could have wished to shut her eyes again, never to open them more in this world. Life looked so blank. And what wonder?

However brave the spirit, it must be affected by its surroundings, and to open one's eyes in a stifling room, with the consciousness that the raised blind will show nothing but a dingy yard, and beyond and on every side of it deserts of dingy yards, the yards shut in by black-looking houses, in all of which the like stifling rooms may reasonably be expected to be found, is, to say the least of it, disheartening.

Margaret's troubles in the little cottage by the seaside, of which she fondly thought as home, had not been less; but there was something in the wide breadths of sea, in its fresh curling waves and in the grand expanse of sky to soothe the dull aching of heart and brain, to give scope to the great doctrine of possibilities, and freedom to dreams that sometimes appeared wild and unreal.

Here it was different. In the narrowness of wall and enclosure life itself was narrowed down till it seemed nothing but a dreary blank of good; in the dull monotony of wood and brick what had been melancholy became bitterness, what had been prayers for help and guidance became one passionate outcry against Providence—one bitter complaint against what the tortured heart too often calls cruel fate.

Young curates are fond of preaching about resignation, notifying to their aged friends the desirability of persevering to the end. I think if ever they come to feel this, that Fate and all her myrmidons are against them, that life is cruel beyond measure, that even faith itself can find no standing-point, they will speak less on this strange, sad theme; but when the victory has been won, when fate and necessity have taken a true place for them in the economy of nature, what they say will be worth far more.

The first discouragement gone by, Margaret felt that she must act, and then came the consciousness that something very disagreeable was before her. She had promised Mrs. Brown to set herself right with her as far as character was concerned, and for this it would be necessary to give references.

A new trouble, and, strange to say, unthought of before. Margaret was little used to the ways of the world: she had hitherto cherished a vague notion that to present herself would be sufficient for the attainment of her object. That she was a lady she imagined (and in this she was not mistaken) could be seen at a glance.

That a lady's character should be looked into like a servant's had not entered into her mind as a necessary part of that to which those who seek for employment must subject themselves. And yet her common sense told her, as she thought it all over in the gray of early morning, that this was perfectly right, and only what she ought to have expected.

The necessity might certainly have been more delicately revealed than by Mrs. Augustus Brown; but Margaret, in her morning review of ways and means, thoroughly recognized the justice of the demand. To answer it was none the less a great difficulty to one of her nature. The long separation from all her friends, who before and after her marriage had been very numerous; the solitary nature of her life during the last four years; above all, that cloud, barely acknowledged even to herself, which rested on her fair fame (she could not tell if *it* had affected her in the opinion of her former world, if many-tongued Rumor had magnified it),—all these things made her task a very difficult one, and as she thought she felt inclined to give up the struggle, to return to her lonely lot and do her best for her child herself.

She had almost come to this conclusion, even the note refusing Mrs. Brown's magnanimous offer was written in her mind, when suddenly an idea flitted across her brain which caused her to hesitate. The thought was of one who in all probability would stand her friend, whose word was worth something, and who knew enough of the circumstances of her history to render it unnecessary for her to enter into painful details.

The friend was a lawyer, the man who managed her affairs. He was well known to her, not so much personally as in a business capacity, and she felt great confidence in his friendliness and judgment. Then she knew that he held a high position, especially in the religious world. Before she rose she had decided at least to consult Mr. Robinson.

If he thought his reference would be sufficient guarantee of respectability to ensure her an entrance into the carefully guarded fold of Mrs. Augustus Brown, she would try to obtain the position; if not, she would make no further effort.

CHAPTER V.

FOUND—A FRIEND.

Most delicately hour by hour
He canvassed human mysteries,
And trod on silk, as if the winds
Blew his own praises in his eyes,
And stood aloof from other minds
In impotence of fancied power.

Mr. Robinson was a man whom women trusted almost instinctively, for, in the first place, he was tall and well made, possessing the advantage of strong, square shoulders and straight, capable-looking legs.

A rogue, especially in the lawyer world, is apt to be thought of as a man of small type, with sharp features, sallow complexion and little, piercing eyes.

Mr. Robinson was florid in complexion, large and muscular in type, fair and frank in manner. He had a way of speaking about business as if everything he did might, with no drawback to himself, remain open for the inspection of men and angels; perhaps best of all, at least so far as ladies and clergymen were concerned, was the pleasing habit he possessed of throwing religion into everything: testamentary dispositions, settlements, conveyancing, chancery suits, all could be conveniently ticketed with a text, and laid away in the capacious recesses of Mr. Robinson's memory, to be brought out on some suitable occasion as notable proofs of his own high position in the favor of Providence.

Mr. Robinson was married. He had thought it incumbent on him to leave progeny on the earth when, to use his lightly-spoken phrase, "himself should be gathered to his fathers." That he possessed, or had once possessed, a father, was a self-evident fact. With regard to the plural number some might be tempted to ejaculate, "The fathers! where are they?" but these were skeptical individuals, verging no doubt on infidelity, for Mr. Robinson considered faith a cardinal virtue, and possessed a genealogical tree which threw its branches far and wide, and traced back to unknown antiquity.

or at least to William the Conqueror and Rollo the Norman, the ancestors of the Robinson family, and of those who had been so happy as to form any connection with it.

This famous specimen of art hung up in Mr. Robinson's office, and was frequently exhibited in all its fulness of detail to lady-clients. They were often obliging enough to interest themselves specially in the lowest branch, where Mr. Robinson had written in a small clear hand-writing the names of six boys, happy fruit of wedlock, destined no doubt to be illustrious, and—not elevate; that would scarcely be possible, considering their antecedents, but—preserve the character of the Robinson family and honor its traditions.

"In the mean time," Mr. Robinson would say, opening the account-book, settlement or will which his lady-client had come to consult, and laughing out a clear hearty laugh which told of no *arrière-pensée*, "I keep the young beggars in good order."

Mr. Robinson was always very busy. If clients, ladies principally, did not happen to be with him during the whole morning, he had a vast arrear of letters to finish. He therefore possessed a large gloomy-looking room, where applicants for the favor of admission to a private interview generall waited until he could be disengaged.

It was into this room that Margaret was shown when, her determination having outlasted dressing and breakfast, sh presented herself to ask if she might see Mr. Robinson.

The clerk said that a gentleman was with Mr. Robinson, but no doubt he would be disengaged presently. He took u her card, and Margaret sat down in the waiting-room, rath glad of the opportunity afforded her of collecting her thoughts, and considering how she could open the subje for, now that she was actually bound on the errand asking a guarantee of respectability from the man she had hitherto looked upon simply as the person who sent he money and transacted her business, it seemed rather harder than she had imagined.

She had a longer time for preparation than she could have desired. Mr. Robinson, as he afterward informed her, was literally overwhelmed with work.

He rose when she entered, set a chair for her, then resumed his own. His manner was nonchalant, even, some might have said, unpolished in its freedom, as he expressed his pleasure at seeing Mrs. Grey, and his hope that nothing unpleasant had brought her so far from home.

Mr. Robinson was much commended for his easy natural manners, but on this occasion, as on a few others, an acute observer might have detected something of nervousness underlying his expansive gestures.

When he had exhausted his vocabulary, Mrs. Grey spoke. Lifting her veil, she fixed her soft brown eyes on Mr. Robinson's face. "I have come to consult you," she said.

"Most happy, I am sure," he replied briskly—"any assistance in my power. It was an unfortunate business. Happily, we secured enough for maintenance."

"You allude to my losses, Mr. Robinson. I am, unfortunately, no woman of business, so I have scarcely understood how it comes that my income is so diminished; but I assure you that I have full confidence in your judgment. Perhaps, as I have come, you will be able to explain these matters to me."

"And delighted," he answered with some eagerness; "it is one of my peculiar crotchets in business to keep all my clients fully conversant with their own affairs. Others act differently, but 'Do unto others,' you know, is one of my chief rules. I live by rule, Mrs. Grey—the highest of all rules, I hope. See here, now," and he laid his hand on a pile of account-books, "this is a case in point. Mrs. Herbert, a widow, large estates, before consulting me scarcely knew what she possessed; now looks regularly over the books, spends an hour here once a month. Danvers, again: young lady about to be married, sent for me to draw up the settlement. 'You know all about it, Mr. Robinson,' she said; 'draw it up as you like.' 'Excuse me, Miss Danvers,' said I. 'I should prefer you to use your own judgment in the matter.' She has done so, and in the course of conversation on the subject has made some very sensible suggestions."

Mr. Robinson did not say to how many different interviews the sensible suggestions had given rise; certainly, however, he had been no loser by them.

"I could quote hundreds of instances, all tending the same way," he continued.

Poor Margaret shook her head: "I am afraid I should find it very difficult to understand."

"Not at all, not at all. Look here, now. What are you anxious to know? I venture to say I'll make it clear to you before you leave this room."

Margaret smiled. This man's frankness pleased her. His manner, though a little unpolished, was, she thought, anything but displeasing; then he seemed to understand business thoroughly. Perhaps he would show that, after all, her affairs were not so desperate as they seemed.

"I am first anxious to know what you mean by writing to me that one of the mortgages has turned out badly," she said.

"Easy to explain," he answered, with a self-satisfied smile. "Only, perhaps, by the bye, I shall have to begin with the A B C, as one may say, and acquaint you with the nature of a mortgage."

"If you please, Mr. Robinson; I am afraid I am ignorant even to that extent."

"So much the better, Mrs. Grey, so much the better: 'A little knowledge'—you know the proverb. Ladies take up *such* ideas when they know, as they imagine, something of business! I had far rather deal with total ignorance on these points; but don't be discouraged. We must begin at the very beginning. Forsaking business terms altogether for the moment, I will, if you please, put this to you simply. You take me, Mrs. Grey?" He smiled with a frankness that was charming to behold. "Do at Rome as Rome does. With ladies talk of business as they are able to understand."

Mrs. Grey smiled her acquiescence.

"Agreed," cried the lawyer effusively. "Well, then, to work. Say now, by way of illustration"—he took a pencil as he spoke and drew a line, writing A at the one end, B at the other and C in the centre—"A represents a person who has a landed estate, houses, what not; B has no landed property, but the value of A's estate in money. B wants to put out his money in some safe way; A, who does not care to sell his property, wants money; steps in C, the intermediate person—a lawyer, we shall say—known to both parties. He negotiates between them, finally arranging for B to lend his money to A on the security of A's property. A deed of mortgage is then drawn up, which makes the agreement binding. A has B's money, pays a half-yearly interest, and if, after a six months' notice, the sum originally lent is not forthcoming, A's property may be sold to make good the default. Do you follow me, Mrs. Grey?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Robinson. You have made clear to me what I never understood before; but under these circumstances I cannot see how my money was actually lost. The property would always be there."

"True, Mrs. Grey." Mr. Robinson gave a somewhat peculiar smile. "I am glad to see that you understand me so thoroughly; your suggestion is in the highest degree practical; there is one consideration, however, which we have not taken into account. Land, unfortunately, depreciates in value, so that at times it would be highly dangerous to the interests of the mortgagee to press a sale. At other times the title of the mortgagor is not perfectly clear. All these things should be carefully looked into beforehand. In your case everything was done, but one cannot be always certain. However, excuse me for correcting your slight inaccuracy. I *think* I never said that this sum of money was lost. I like to be perfectly certain on these points. Perhaps you can refer to the passage in my letter in which I announced this unfortunate business."

He looked at her with some anxiety—nervousness perhaps an acute observer might have said, but Margaret was not an acute observer.

She smiled and shook her head: "Quite impossible, Mr. Robinson. I never keep my letters, especially business ones. I *have* been told that this habit is a bad one; but *à quoi bon?* It is really too much trouble."

The lawyer showed his teeth. "A lady's view of matters," he said briskly; "and, after all, full of common sense. Why *should* you trouble yourself? However, to return *à nos moutongs*, as the French would say" (Mr. Robinson had spent a year in a French school, and considered himself a perfect master of the language), "I am happy to say that your affairs are likely to take a favorable turn. I have a hold on the fellow for another little matter; indeed, I may say that he is completely in my power. With your permission I will open proceedings against him."

Mr. Robinson always spoke the truth—at least, as some one said in the House of Commons lately, "what he thought the truth." But, though his affairs were open to the inspection of men and angels, he did not consider mental reservation a sin, even where it would seriously affect the character of a truth which he had ingenuously stated. He guarded himself from telling Mrs. Grey that the other little business was a large sum owed to himself by Mrs. Grey's debtor, and that he was fully determined to screw this out of him before another debt should be paid.

The knowledge of want or of something approaching it—want rather of the refinements of life than of its necessities—had made Margaret look with far more interest on money than she had ever done before. Formerly, it had been a certain something that always came at the right moment—for Mr. Robinson was as regular as clockwork in the transaction of his business—and that came in amounts amply sufficient to meet every need. What wonder that she thought little of how it came, and was tolerably lavish in its expenditure?

Now, everything was changed. Money meant education for Laura, the refinements and amenities of life for herself; above all, independence. The want of it meant servitude, drudgery, perhaps even the squalor of poverty. But she was not sufficiently acquainted with business to imagine that some one might be to blame for the failing mortgage—that it could be possible to call her solicitor to account.

She trusted Mr. Robinson implicitly. For was he not a good man? Righteous overmuch, some people said; one who conducted his business in an open, off-hand kind of way, which savored more of the harmlessness of the dove than of the wisdom of the serpent? Did not his frank smile and cheerful greeting speak of a quiet conscience? Did not worthy people of all denominations consult him in the management of their affairs?

Margaret could not have suspected Mr. Robinson, and his cheerful way of suggesting proceedings and their mysterious effect filled her with new hope. She looked up eagerly: "Oh, Mr. Robinson, then you really think there is hope?"

"My dear lady," he answered in his peculiarly lively way, "I have not the smallest doubt of it. Be content, for the time being, with your small income, and, take my word for it, before six months have passed over our heads we shall (by the Divine assistance—of course, we must never forget that, Mrs. Grey) be able to pay back into your account the larger part, if not all, of the sum in question."

The tears filled Margaret's eyes. Had she grown so very mercenary, then? I scarcely think so. *Her* delight was that of the escaped captive. There would be no necessity now to prosecute her painful search for employment. The yoke that already, by anticipation, was galling her might be thrown off with a clear conscience. Mr. Robinson's word meant more than that of most people, and he gave six months as the duration of her penury. During that time her little daughter would scarcely require more instruction than she could give; they had still sufficient to enable them to live quietly; and even should she be a loser to some extent, there would no doubt be sufficient left for Laura's education. If not, it would be time enough then to think of ways and means.

She gave a sigh of intense relief, then looked up, smiling through a mist of gathering tears: "I am very foolish, Mr. Robinson, but your words have taken *such* a load from my mind! I had come here to-day to consult you about taking a situation as governess. They wanted—that is, I mean," she blushed as she spoke, "a reference, you know, was necessary, so I came to you about it."

"To give you a reference," replied he, with a smile that made Margaret wince, there was so much assurance in its cordiality. "You could not have come to a better person. My connection is very large, and, I may say without unduly boasting (these earthly gifts must all be looked upon as coming from above), where the name of Robinson is known it is respected. A curious proof of this occurred yesterday." Here Mr. Robinson was interrupted by one of his clerks, who brought up the intimation that Lord —— was waiting to see him. "Say I am with a lady-client; beg his lordship to wait a few moments." Then, as the clerk went down with the message, "You see," he continued, turning to Mrs. Grey, "all my clients stand on the same footing. If the prince of Wales came here to consult me on business-matters, I should request him to wait his turn. But as we need not keep any one unnecessarily in suspense, my little anecdote must be narrated on another occasion. Remarkable circumstance, too—fresh proof, if that were needed, of the existence of an overruling Providence."

Margaret rose from her seat, scarcely perhaps so impressed as she might have been with the noble impartiality of her solicitor.

"One moment," he said, drawing out his cheque-book. Now, Mr. Robinson loved his cheque-book. It was his sceptre, the insignia of his power. He always produced it with a certain consciousness of superiority, and made over the trifling pieces of paper which his name had rendered valuable as if they had been princely gifts.

"While this affair is pending," he continued pompously, "you are no doubt somewhat straitened. I shall be glad to relieve you from undue embarrassment. I will write out a cheque for twenty pounds. And you may draw upon me from time to time—always in moderation, of course."

A blush dyed Margaret's cheek. For a moment she felt disinclined to put herself under any obligation to this man, whose style of offering assistance was not very palatable to her high spirits. Then she remembered that this was business—a thing, no doubt, done every day. And his manner—Well, it was simply that of a man not quite accustomed to polite society. It arose from ignorance, and was a proof, if any were needed, of his honesty. His worst faults lay evidently on the surface, covering over, as in many cases, a good and noble nature.

These, allow me to say, were Margaret's reflections; it does not, therefore, follow that they were absolutely correct. Women have a trick of rushing to conclusions. A man weighs and balances, sets this quality against that, thinks out the effect of one upon the other, and in many cases comes to a conclusion slowly and with difficulty. It is well. He is not so often deceived. A woman has generally a preconceived idea, a prejudice for or against. This being so, it is more than natural that some expression of countenance, some tone of voice, some trick of manner, should fall in with her preformed judgment, and cause, in the shortest time imaginable, a conclusion which scarcely anything will shake. She believes even against proof self-evident to the rest of the world. This, no doubt, is partly the reason why helpless, lonely women are so often cheated and robbed.

Margaret was in this position. I do not mean to say that she had been cheated and robbed. Her position was that of full confidence in the man who transacted her business. She had thought of him as a friend: she had found him frank and honest, no suspicion of the legal rogue in his face or manner. Therefore she came to this conclusion: Mr. Robinson was her friend, he looked after her interests very carefully, he would set her affairs right if any one could. This being so, what mattered a little want of polish? She could very well afford to dispense with it.

"Thank you," she said as Mr. Robinson handed her the cheque; "I cannot deny that this will be of present assistance to me."

Mr. Robinson then rose in his turn, shook his fair client's hand with perhaps more than necessary empressement, and escorted her to the door.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YOUNG HEIR.

> But the ground
> Of all great thoughts is sadness.

Arthur Forrest was certainly developing a taste for art—not at all a bad taste, his friends said one to the other, for a young man who had amply sufficient to live upon. It would fill up his time, keep him from the dangers of idleness, give him, in fact, something to think about. For art could easily be pursued in a most gentlemanlike manner. A person who fills the position, not of an artist indeed, but of an intelligent patron of the fine arts, is not only a useful member of society, but one who is held in some estimation by the world.

There were many who took a very close interest in the affairs of young Arthur Forrest, for he was, or would be in a few weeks—that was all the period that divided him from his majority—a young man of property. Then he was an orphan. What more natural than that tender, sympathetic young ladies and pious, well-conducted matrons should watch his proceedings with affectionate interest, and strive to do what lay within their power to save him from the evil influences which were popularly supposed to be immediately surrounding him?

Unfortunately for the pious matrons and sympathetic young ladies, Arthur was well taken care of.

Mrs. Churchill was his aunt. She had tended him in his infancy, as she often said pathetically to a circle of admirers; she had the first claim on his love and gratitude. The gratitude Mrs. Churchill was anxious to keep as her inalienable right in Arthur: the love she had already passed on to her daughter and representative, pretty Adèle.

And hitherto Arthur had shown himself dutifully content with the arrangement. He did not think much of girls as a class, and certainly Adèle was as good a specimen of them as he had ever met. Then he was accustomed to her; she generally knew how to keep him amused; she was pretty, lively and well dressed. Till Arthur met Margaret he had never admired a shabby person. In fact, he was languidly grateful to Aunt Ellen and the Fates for having arranged matters so comfortably, because matters were actually arranged.

Mrs. Churchill knew the world she lived in too well to allow such a thing as a tacit understanding between the cousins, which a young man's whim could break through in a moment. She did not intend that her daughter's first youth and beauty should be spent in a devotion which was destined to meet with no adequate return. Adèle was rich and pretty—she would have no difficulty in meeting with a suitable partner; only to keep Arthur and his money in the family was desirable. Besides, he was young; he would make an amenable son-in-law; then he was already accustomed to the yoke—no small point this, in Mrs. Churchill's estimation.

When, therefore, Adèle had reached the age of eighteen and Arthur that of twenty—events which had happened almost simultaneously shortly before my story opens—Mrs. Churchill, as she fondly hoped and believed, put the finishing stroke to the edifice she had been forming. It had been her aim, during the few years that had passed since Arthur had emerged into young manhood, to make her house the most agreeable place in the world to him, and in this she had been eminently successful. Adèle had ably assisted her, for she, poor child! had always cherished affection for her handsome cousin—an affection which the dawn of womanhood and her mother's fostering influence ripened without much difficulty into a tenderer feeling.

She found it not easy, then, when wise eighteen had arrived, to understand her mother's tactics, for Arthur the welcome guest began from that date to be less warmly received, and obstacles were thrown in the way of their meetings, which had been so delightfully frequent and unembarrassed. They came notably from Mrs. Churchill, and yet her personal affection for her nephew seemed only to have increased; there was a tinge of gentle regret in her manner even while she appeared to be sending him from them.

It was almost more inexplicable to Arthur than to Adèle, and at last he could bear it no longer.

With the love of universal popularity so common to his age, he hated the idea of being in his relative's bad graces; besides, the charms of his cousin's society increased tenfold in his imagination as difficulties cropped up to interfere with his quiet enjoyment of them.

"By Jove!" he said to himself in the course of a cigar-fed meditation, "I must have it out with Aunt Ellen at once."

That was a memorable moment in his history. With the impulsiveness of youth he extinguished his cigar and repaired in haste to Mrs. Churchill's handsome residence. He found her alone in her drawing-room, pensive but loftily kind, and soon extracted from her what she would so much rather have kept to herself—that she was acting in Adèle's interests; the dear girl was impressionable, the relationship dangerous; much as she loved her nephew, she must not forget that a mother's first duty was to watch over her child; and much more of a like nature, to all of which Arthur listened dutifully. Of course he was no match for his aunt; before the evening of that day had arrived he occupied the position of an accepted lover, blessed by a happy parent, and possessed what perhaps, on some future day, he might possibly be led to imagine the dear-bought privilege of a free *entrée* into Aunt Ellen's house. Since then matters had progressed satisfactorily, as far as Mrs. Churchill was concerned, though Adèle, who took almost a motherly interest in her lover and future husband, was inclined to lament the absolute aimlessness of his life.

Women, generally speaking, have a quicker mental growth than men. The mind of a girl of eighteen is in many cases more mature than that of a man of twenty. Arthur had passed his twenty years without much thought beyond himself. Adèle, with the like luxurious surroundings, had already begun to look past herself—to feel that there was a world of which she knew nothing, but with which, nevertheless, she was very closely connected—a world of want and suffering, where wrong was too often triumphant.

She was fond of reading. Perhaps some of these thoughts had crept in through the medium of poet and historian. For Adèle's insight told her that there were many higher and nobler lives for a man and woman to lead than that of self-pleasing. She sometimes longed to be a man, that she might do something worth doing in a world that wanted the active and the strong. But the little she could do she did, and had she known how many blessed her for her gentle words and timely aid, she might have been less desponding about a woman's ability to take some place in the world.

For the rest she looked to Arthur, the hero of her imagination. Poor Adèle! Her hero did not quite see as she did the necessity for exertion. He took life languidly, and could not conceive why people should excite themselves about what did not concern them; at least this was what he always said when she tried to instill into him some of her ideas about human wrongs and human service.

But Adèle did not despair; she had a woman's supreme faith in "the to-come." Something would arouse Arthur's dormant energies and bring out the latent fire of his nature.

In the mean time she, with the rest of his world, was pleased to notice his growing interest in the fine arts, though she, wiser than they, felt inclined to put down his constant haunting of the picture-galleries to a growing restlessness that meant uneasiness with the aimless life of self-gratification he was leading and a stretching-out after something higher.

And Adèle was partially right. Arthur was changed. Perhaps it was more the sadness than the beauty of that fair woman's face which haunted him so strangely, mingling with all his thoughts a certain self-reproach which he found it very difficult to understand.

It may have been that in the pale, calm face, resolute in endurance, he saw for one moment what was going on for ever around him; he read the mystic law of nature—sacrifice of self. For life is glad; where gladness is not life may be borne, but not loved or rejoiced in, and in the calm surrender of life's gladness to the call of life's necessity there is a surrender of life itself, the most beautiful part of life.

Something of this he had seen in Margaret's pale face. A joy put away, surrendered, a burden taken up and patiently borne. This it was that filled his mind when the first impression of her loveliness had in a manner passed. He saw the suffering, and beside the suffering he saw himself, self-indulgent, careless, free of hand, light of spirit, with no thought, in a general way, beyond the enjoyment of the present hour.

Often before Arthur had expressed something of this: lolling in a luxurious arm-chair with his feet on the fender, while Adèle amused him by a song or read to him something that had been charming her, he would say with a comfortable sigh, "What a good-for-nothing sort of fellow I am, Adèle!"

But then he had scarcely felt it, or if he had it had been only with a kind of impression that the good-for-nothingness sat elegantly on the shoulders of a young man of property.

Clever Mrs. Churchill rather encouraged the impression. Young men with ideas are apt to become unmanageable, and she was earnestly desirous of keeping Arthur in her invisible leading-strings.

But this time Arthur felt it. There was suffering, sorrow, wrong in the world; he was doing nothing but vegetate on its surface, keeping his comforts, his gladness, his fresh young life for his own selfish gratification. And the worst of it all was that he did not see a way out of it. In the days of chivalry young knights went out armed to fight for defenceless women and redress human wrongs. Arthur felt sure that his mysterious lady had been in some way cruelly wronged, and he longed to constitute himself her protector and knight; but in the first place she had persistently denied herself to him; in the second place her wrongs might prove to be such as he would find himself utterly unable to redress.

He was bound to Adèle, and if it had not been so he felt instinctively that he was scarcely a suitable husband for the beautiful widow. (Arthur had made up his mind that Margaret *was* a widow.) Under such circumstances, even if so minor an evil as poverty were her trouble, there would be a certain incongruity in offering her half his fortune, and she would probably resent such a step. He could offer it anonymously, but even in such case it would be quite possible that she might think it right to decline acceptance, and Mrs. Churchill would reasonably consider Adèle and any children she might have wronged by the proceeding. Arthur, in fact, had wandered into a maze whence there really seemed to be no exit. His only hope was to see Margaret again. One more glimpse of her fair face might do more toward unravelling the mystery than hours of lonely pondering. This, then, it was, rather more than love of art, that led him to haunt the picture-galleries, and especially the one where he had first seen her.

But if it were this that led him, something else kept him. Wandering hither and thither by these trophies of mind, with this new earnestness in his spirit, he began to feel in them a power unsuspected in his former languid visits. They represented work, conflict, triumph. Each picture had its history, into each were wrought the mingled threads of human experience. In the dim glory that shone from one or two of these transcripts of Nature Arthur read the struggle of soul to express itself worthily, and his young spirit was stirred within him.

In the loving detail, all beautiful of its kind, with which the artist surrounded the fair queen of his homage, he saw the earnestness of genius, and bowing his head he worshipped in the great temple of Humanity.

The young man's thoughts began to run, not on his own elegance and superiority, but on the great problems of Nature and Art. Self was removed from its lofty pedestal. What the fair woman's face had begun human genius carried on. Arthur Forrest was changed.

CHAPTER VII.

A CUNNING TEMPTER.

Thou art woman;
And that is saying the best and worst of thee.

MARGARET'S business in London was over. The more she thought about her visit to Mr. Robinson, the more certain she felt that her affairs were in capable hands, and that her money difficulties would very soon disappear.

She wrote, therefore, to Mrs. Augustus Brown, declining the honor of becoming a member of her household.

That lady was considerably annoyed at first. Afterward she consoled herself by the reflection that her own presence of mind had saved her sweet innocents from a terrible danger. It was only too evident, she remarked to the passive Brown, that Mrs. Grey's antecedents would not bear looking into. It was a fresh instance of the danger to which the inexperienced were subjected in London. Had she not been very watchful she might have been misguided by that woman's remarkable appearance.

Mr. Augustus pricked up his ears at this.

"In what way was she remarkable, my love?" he blandly inquired.

To which civil question Mrs. Brown, recalling her former uneasiness, only replied by shaking her fat shoulders and descanting volubly on the fruitful theme of male curiosity.

It is highly probable that Margaret had a happy escape, in spite of "salary no object, and masters for every branch."

As soon as the letter had been despatched she began to think of home and Laura, and to lay her plans for return. But, first, various articles of wearing apparel would have to be procured, for Margaret was not at all fond of shabbiness for its own sake, and her little girl's wardrobe was, she knew, sadly in need of replenishment.

So she put off her departure for a day or two, that this business, so much more pleasing than what had hitherto been occupying her, might be satisfactorily accomplished. Between shopping and needlewomen the next few days passed by with considerable rapidity and far more brightness of spirit; and then Margaret thought that before leaving London she might pay a farewell visit to the pictures, and, especially, to the one which had so powerfully attracted her.

Dressing herself with far more care than on the previous occasion—for the black stuff was replaced by silk, and over it the rich Indian scarf, for which Margaret seemed to cherish a peculiar affection, looked more in keeping—she started on a bright afternoon in an omnibus that took her to the very door of the Exhibition.

For this once Margaret wished to enjoy without fatigue. And she certainly *did* enjoy. Coming from the brightness and life of the May day into the cool shade of the galleries (it was too early in the day for the fashionable crowd), with the wealth of coloring and suggestive beauty on every side, nothing to do but to wander from one gem of art to the other,—all this was really delightful to Margaret. It was easy work at first, but as the day wore on the usual crowds began to pour into the galleries, and moving about became somewhat more difficult.

Margaret was there to see the pictures and refresh herself with their beauty. She did not, therefore, pay much attention to the many who were coming and going, and was in consequence perfectly unconscious of the notice she herself attracted; for many who caught a glimpse of her fair face in passing turned instinctively and looked again. There was one who admired her specially.

He was a little sandy-haired individual who had been wandering about rather disconsolately with his wife. Having at last been able to escort her to a seat, he was venturing to look round when he caught sight of Margaret Grey. It was a happy moment. She was looking up at one of Millais' suggestive pieces; the full appreciation of its meaning gave a certain spirituality to her face, and her lips were parted in a smile of calm enjoyment.

He was struck dumb with astonishment. Had it not been for the presence of his wife and a snub-nosed olive-branch he would have improved the occasion by trying to find out something about this new beauty.

As it was, he turned away his eyes from beholding vanity, and looked down on the opposite virtue, his wife, whose eyes, strange to say, were beholding vanity too. With the assistance of her eye-glasses they were scanning the object that had previously attracted the attention of her lord.

The heart of the sandy-haired throbbed with unusual excitement, but (oh the treachery of the male sex!) he smothered excitement under an appearance of utter indifference.

"Do you know that lady, my love?" he inquired in his blandest tones.

"Lady, indeed!" replied Mrs. Brown, for the moment forgetting her prudence in her indignation. "It's Mrs. Grey, who *was* to have been my children's governess, Mr. Brown. Now I hope you *see!*"

Mr. Augustus did *not* precisely see, but for the sake of peace and quietness he professed to be very much enlightened, and proceeded with a man's temerity to make some other trifling observation about the pseudo-governess.

He met with a smart rebuke for his pains, and then Mrs. Brown, feeling no doubt that the locality was dangerous, requested that her carriage should be found.

When the unhappy Brown returned dutifully to escort her to where it was in waiting for its dainty burden the vision of female loveliness had vanished, and though he paid more visits to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy than he had ever done before, the vision never returned. Alas, the cruelty of human nature as exemplified by watchful wives!

Margaret did not know what mischief she was causing. She had found her way to the little sea-piece which had already spoken so powerfully to her imagination. And there it was that at last Arthur Forrest's eyes were gladdened once more with a sight of the face that had haunted him.

He was standing near the entrance of the room, lost in the crowd, which was every moment increasing, when she passed by him so closely that her silk dress touched him. He had been watching for her daily, but at the fateful moment her appearance took him by surprise.

He had formed plans without number for addressing her, without showing himself obtrusive or inquisitive. The very words of polite inquiry after her health, the manner in which, by courtesy and chivalrous deference, all her fears would be set at rest, had been rehearsed again and again in colloquy between himself and a Margaret evoked by his dream; but when the moment had come, when the real Margaret was near, all his plans vanished like mists before the sun—he was bashful and timid as a young *débutante*. Instead of emerging from the crowd which seemed to swallow up his identity and claiming acquaintance with her, he drew farther back into its friendly shelter. He could not address her yet, he said to himself; he must seize the opportunity of gazing once more on her fair face.

He saw her walk quietly through the gallery and pause near one of the seats, the scene of their memorable rencontre only a few days previously. It was full, so she stood beside it, gazing with dreamy pleasure at the picture of the westering sea.

She looked at the picture, and Arthur in his safe retirement looked at her; indeed, he was so absorbed in the contemplation that it needed a very smart tap on the shoulder from a gentleman who had come up behind him, and who had already addressed one or two remarks to him utterly in vain, to awake him to a sense of things as they were, and to the consciousness of the existence of some few people in the world besides himself and Margaret Grey.

As he looked round he reddened with annoyance, and yet Captain Mordaunt, the gentleman who had broken in upon his reverie, was a man with whom most young men liked to be seen. Not that he was particularly attractive, for his hair was turning gray, his face was blotchy, his neck red and long, and his nose beginning to take the hue of the purple grape. Then, too, his manner was apt to be snappish and sarcastic, especially to young men. But what was all this when it was a certain fact that he knew, as they would have said, "an awful lot;" that he was the fashion; that he counted his intrigues by the hundred? Indeed it was whispered, and not without foundation, some said, that not only actresses and inferior people of that description were concerned in them; the names of ladies of high rank had been associated with that of Alfred Mordaunt. But this of course may have been only rumor, for rumor is thousand-tongued and not particularly charitable. In any case, the gallant captain did not seem to care to deny the soft imputations. He considered it his chief mission in life to be a lady-killer.

Arthur was not above the weaknesses of his day and generation; he had often courted Captain Mordaunt in the past. The past! How soon those few days had become the past, the great blank of existence, when he had lived without having seen *her!*

What annoyed Arthur so particularly was this. He saw in a moment that he had betrayed his secret by his own folly—that Captain Mordaunt, the last person in the world to whom he would have spoken of his romantic devotion, had traced the direction of his glance, and with eye-glass fixed was taking a look on his own account. The look was followed by another tap, a congratulatory one, on Arthur's shoulder. "By Jove, Master Arthur! you have taste! The finest woman I've seen for some time, 'pon my solemn word and honor! And beauties are something in my line too. Not of the pink-and-white sort either, that generally goes down with you young fellows. There's refinement, intelligence, and what d'you call it, that painters make a fuss about, in that face."

His comments sent the indignant blood to the very roots of young Arthur's hair. He made an heroic effort at indifference. "I am really at a loss to understand you, Captain Mordaunt," he stammered.

The gallant captain laughed, holding his sides as if the merriment overpowered him utterly.

"*Very* good! *Very* good!" he cried between the paroxysms. "Sly boy! Didn't know you were so deep. Want to keep all to yourself, eh? I'll warrant the fair cousin knows nothing."

The color faded from Arthur's face, but there came a dangerous light into his eyes. "I wish you would keep your remarks and your ill-timed jokes to yourself, Captain Mordaunt," he said sullenly.

The captain looked astonished, and whistled softly for a moment. "Gently, gently, young spitfire!" he said lightly. "But come, who is she? Let an old friend into the secret. Why, I declare, ——" (mentioning a lady of more repute for beauty than character) "couldn't hold a candle to her."

This was almost too much for Arthur. He turned round with flashing eyes, and there was a subdued force in his voice as he answered, using the first rash words that came to his lips, "How *dare* you speak of *her* in such a connection? I am a younger man than you, but, by Heaven! if you should repeat such an insult I could strike you down where you stand."

The captain laughed again, with a trifle of uneasiness this time, and he turned a little pale. Rumor said that he was a coward, but probably his fear in the present instance was of a row in this public place. However that might be, he certainly took Arthur's challenge rather coolly. "Calm yourself, young man," he said more seriously than he had yet spoken. "I scarcely knew I was treading on such dangerous ground, and certainly could not mean to insult any friend of yours. You know this lady, I presume, since you are so hot in her defence?"

Again Arthur blushed. What a fool he felt himself! Captain Mordaunt in this mood was less easy to escape than in his former one. "I know her," he answered after a pause, "only very slightly."

"Very slightly, I imagine so," replied the other satirically. "It is not the first time *I* have seen her, though," he added *sotto voce*.

Arthur was all attention in a moment: "*Where* have you met her, Captain Mordaunt?"

"Oh, that is *my* secret. We can all be close when it suits our turn. A word in your ear, young man. Ultra modesty, faith in the immaculate—you take me?—never goes down with women. I know something of them, and they're all alike. There! don't look indignant. Follow up your advantage, if you've gained any, and before long you may find out that I am right, and thank me for the hint."

Margaret had found a place at last on the crimson seat. As the last words were spoken she was leaning forward, her head resting on one of her hands, from which she had taken the glove. There was marvellous grace in her position. The long white fingers, the flushed cheek, the dark weary eyes and the slender bowed form made such a picture as few could have looked upon unmoved.

Captain Mordaunt, whose eyes had never stirred from her face, smiled softly (a smile that made Arthur writhe mentally), and clapped his thumb-nails together as though he had been applauding some favorite actress.

"Bravo!" he said in a low tone to his companion: "there's a pose for you—knows she's being admired. Bless you, lad! it's women's way; and so innocent all the time, the pretty pets! By ——, I'd like awfully to follow this up on my own account. But," and he gave a deep sigh, "I've too many on hand already—won't do. Like the Yankee, I shall be 'crowded out.' I leave the field clear for a younger knight. By-bye, old fellow—best wishes. I must be off—was due at Lady ———'s an hour ago."

In another moment he was gone, but before he left the hall he turned and looked at his young companion, and as he looked his lips curled. Arthur did not see him, nor did he hear his muttered comment: "Poor fool! he'll have his wings singed for him, but serve him right for his impertinence. Knock *me* down, indeed!"

In Arthur's mind very different thoughts and feelings were struggling for ascendency. Indignation, disgust, loathing of this world-sated man and his wisdom—these the better side of his nature prompted, rejecting with spiritual insight the unholy poison; but there was a lurking demon within him, the *ego* Arthur had been striving to trample upon, and to it all this was sympathetic.

Perhaps, after all, Captain Mordaunt was right. Chivalry and its attendant virtues belonged rather to the region of the imagination than to the matter-of-fact life of humanity. It was the way of the world for men to amuse themselves while they could. It had been Captain Mordaunt's way, and what a pleasant life *he* led! Petted, caressed, flattered, at home in some of the noblest mansions in England, his word law in all matters of etiquette, grand ladies considering it an honor to entertain him. He had not gained this position by squeamishness: *that* point he allowed every one to know.

Arthur's heart told him that all this was false—that whatever or whoever the light loves of Captain Mordaunt might have been, the lady whom he admired was pure, true, unconscious of evil. He felt instinctively, with the insight lively sympathy often gives to the young, that to take advantage in any way of her lonely position would be to shut himself out from the place he had been so happy as to gain in her kindly remembrance, and to preclude himself from all hope of rendering her any further assistance in the future.

But the demon of self is strong, and the voice of the heart when opposed to it is weak. The pathetic voice of Arthur's heart was soon silenced by the echo which self-love gave to Captain Mordaunt's words of falsest wisdom. He looked at his fair ideal, but his feelings had changed. The animal within him was loudly asserting its right to be heard; the self-indulgent nature, which a life of luxury had fostered, persuaded itself easily that all was right, and his fair woman only as others. Cherishing such feelings, he could not look calmly on her face. With a new fire in his veins he turned away to wait outside the building until Margaret should make her appearance.

The waiting seemed long, but it did not cool his ardor or recall his former wisdom. Backward and forward he paced, up and down, with careful observation of all who left the building, until at last he began to fear either that he had suffered her to escape him, and thus lost all chance of finding out more about her—this was the vague way in which his plans were laid—or that something had delayed her, another fainting-fit perhaps. The bare idea maddened him; he put his hand to his head, he felt dizzy; this was very different from his nonchalant waiting for Adèle a few days previously, even from that daily hope—calm through all its earnestness—of looking once more on the face of his ideal.

That fatal tree! How many young souls are lost by the passionate craving for its fruit! The man of the world had held its beautiful poison to the young man's lips, and he could not tell that beneath the glory lay dust and ashes.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARTHUR FALLS INTO THE SNARE.

Let me not think I have thought too well of thee.
Be as thou wast.

SHE came out at last. Arthur saw her, and began with feverish anxiety to trace every line of her face and form. Her veil was thrown back, he noticed that, and even while he did so hated himself for his suspicion. "She knows her beauty," said the false self within him; "it will not be difficult to show her that others know it too."

But he noticed something more, something that aroused the warm sympathies of his nature: the face that a few moments ago had glowed with excitement was very pale, and the sweet lips were quivering slightly—it might be with fatigue, it might be with nervousness. A woman feels so lonely in great London, and loneliness in a crowd is the bitterest kind of loneliness to a sensitive nature.

In a very few moments Arthur's measures were taken. Waiting until she had passed on her way, he hailed a hansom, shouted out to the driver the address of the shabby street which he had visited with his cousin a few days previously, and was presently on his way to Margaret's temporary home.

With what view? She had requested him expressly not to follow up the acquaintanceship—she was living by herself in close retirement. She might very probably be offended at his visit.

Arthur was young and impulsive: he said nothing of all this to himself, or rather, with Captain Mordaunt's hateful hints in his mind, he persuaded himself that it would be only too easy to gain her forgiveness for his disobedience. As he was whirled along through the streets the young man's heart throbbed. Be it remembered that he was inexperienced in the world's ways, and had lived up to this time under strict petticoat-government. The very breaking free was exhilarating to his senses—so much so, indeed, that he did not even stop to reflect on the course he should pursue when, as he hoped and trusted, he would meet her face to face.

And Margaret in the mean time, knowing nothing of the temporary madness her face had caused, was making her way as quickly as she could through the throng and bustle of London to her lodgings in Islington.

Arthur had purposely delayed, and she arrived at the house before him. As the hansom dashed into the street, the young man caught a glimpse of her black dress disappearing behind one of the dingiest doors.

Now first he began to tremble a little at the thought of his own impulsive folly. He stood irresolute; he half made up his mind to return at once. But the voice of the tempter, "I know something of women, and they're all alike," rang in his ear.

"I will at least try," said the foolish young man to himself, and with a certain tremor at his heart he rang the door-bell.

The dirty maid-servant looked at him in astonishment. Mrs. Grey had received some distinguished visitors, notably the brilliant owner of the yellow chariot, but as yet no handsome, fashionably-dressed young gentleman had presented himself.

Margaret, as we know, had only one sitting-room. Judging from the elegance of his appearance that this visitor would be surely welcome, the girl took upon herself, without waiting for Mrs. Grey's permission, to usher the young gentleman into the dingy parlor.

Margaret was seated there. She had thrown off her bonnet, and smiling half pleasantly, half sadly, was examining a little frock, which had just been sent home by the dressmaker she employed.

Instinctively, Arthur paused on the threshold. This rapid crowning of his hopes was so unexpected as almost to take his breath away. But looking at her he dared not presume. There was in the solitary woman's face at the moment that beautiful mother-look, that calm Madonna tenderness, which makes the human charm of Raphael's divine conceptions of the Virgin. Feeling that he had been presumptuous and vain, Arthur would fain have turned and fled from this calm woman's presence, but now it was too late.

The opening of the door had disturbed Margaret's dream. She turned round, the tender mother-look changed into utter astonishment. Poor Arthur! She did not even seem to know him. Certainly, the room was rather dark, and his appearance had taken her completely by surprise; still, this swift forgetfulness was a terrible blow to his youthful vanity.

Scarcely knowing what to do with himself or how to account for his visit, he advanced, awkwardly enough, into the little dull room, and Margaret rose from her seat. To the excited imagination of the young man the lonely, shabby woman had passed suddenly into a stately queen of society.

As if awaiting his explanation she stood, but now his lips were sealed, his fine phrases deserted him, he could not stammer out a word of explanation.

It was Margaret who broke the embarrassing silence: "Sir, to what do I owe—"

He broke her short: "Mrs. Grey, you are cruel. Surely you must remember, you must know, I mean—understand—the interest, the enthusiasm—"

She was looking at him fixedly as he spoke, and at last his confusion became so overpowering that he stopped short. Then he could have bit out his tongue for his audacity, for the astonishment in her face was replaced by a keen and bitter pain.

"I remember you now," she said very slowly. "Yes, you are the young gentleman who some few days ago received the fervent thanks of a lonely woman for his chivalrous kindness."

The red blood mounted to Arthur's cheek. Unable longer to bear the gaze of those mournful eyes, he threw himself down on the nearest chair and covered his face with his hands.

"You did not understand me then," she continued very sadly; "you thought that—"

"Stop, for pity's sake, stop!" cried the young man, lifting up an agitated face. "I know all you would say. I am a weak, miserable fool, not worthy of having even been allowed to assist you; but if you only knew."

His penitence seemed to subdue her indignation. "Foolish boy!" she said with one of her rarely beautiful smiles. "I know perfectly well, and therefore it is that I forgive this impertinence. A little experience of the world will teach you your mistake. Three days ago I read in your young frank face that you judged me rightly, and I thanked you in my heart. I will not retract the judgment I formed of you then; but remember, what you have done is foolish and ought never to be repeated."

"I know it—I know it," moaned Arthur; "but may I never see you again? Ah! if by any service, however hard, I could make you happier than you are!"

She put out her hand, smiling kindly into his earnest face: "The best service you can render me now is to shake hands and say good-bye. As I said to you before, we move in different worlds. You will soon forget this infatuation, or only remember it as a warning against taking any advantage, however slight, of an unprotected woman. In that case I shall have rendered you a service."

Where was Captain Mordaunt's wisdom? Banished by a few words from a weak but noble woman. Happy for Arthur that the fair face hid a fairer soul! The poison was drawn out of his heart, and youth's own chivalry took its right place in his nature.

Bowing low over the offered hand, he answered in a broken voice, "I obey you, and I thank you. I cannot promise to forget, but from this time all my thoughts of you shall be tinged by the deep respect which is your due."

CHAPTER IX.

ARTHUR'S SECRET.

And I loved her—loved her, certes,
As I loved all heavenly objects, with uplifted eyes and hands—
As I loved pure inspiration, loved the Graces, loved the Virtues,
In a love content with writing his own name on desert sands.

A LUXURIOUS drawing-room, furnished with all the taste and elegance that money can command; flowers here, there and everywhere—flowers in the deep recesses of lace-veiled windows, flowers on the multitude of tables that stood in every corner, flowers—and these the sweetest of them all—in the lap of a young fair-haired girl who filled a corner of one of the sofas.

She was paying no great attention to the flowers, only bathing one of her hands in them from time to time, as though to refresh herself with their cool fragrance. The other hand, her eyes and her whole soul appeared to be given to the book she held, an elegant little volume bound in fawn-colored calfskin.

She was so deeply engrossed that she did not hear the door open, and her cousin had time to cross the long room, sit down by her side and take possession of the hand that was trifling with the flowers before she was aware of his presence.

Then she looked up, blushed charmingly and closed her book: "Arthur dear, how delightful! I began to think you were never coming near us again, and I wanted particularly to speak to you about something that has been in my head ever since our visit to the Academy."

"Four days!" answered Arthur, languidly, throwing himself back on the sofa—"an enormous time, as young ladies would say, for one subject to engross them, especially in this age of progress."

"I suppose it would be absurd to imagine that *you* even remember, Master Arthur," replied Adèle, quite equal to the occasion—"*boys*, as mamma always says, are *so* volatile."

"Boys!" Arthur shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "You are very polite to-day, Adèle."

There was a shade of annoyance in his voice, which made Adèle look up at him, for she was a kind little lady who never carried her jokes too far. The result of the look was a rapid movement from her side of the sofa to Arthur's, and an earnest inquiry: "Arthur dear, something is wrong with you, you must surely be ill."

For Arthur's face was pale, and there was a wan, anxious contraction on his broad white brow.

His only answer was a faint smile. Then, after a pause, "You were reading, Adèle. Oh!" lifting the book from the small reading-table that stood conveniently near the sofa, "*The Faërie Queene*. I thought it would be something of the kind. Read some of it aloud, like a good girl; I'm too done up with this hot weather to talk just now."

"Poor old fellow!" Adèle smoothed back his curly hair and imprinted a kiss, that did not seem to excite her cousin particularly, between his temples. "Your forehead is so hot, dear, let me bathe it with eau-de-cologne for you."

She opened a little bottle of richly-cut, ruby-colored glass, and pouring some of its sweet contents on her handkerchief pressed it again and again to his brow, Arthur submitting with the delicate grace of an invalid.

"There," he said at last, "that'll do, dear; you can read now."

And the obedient Adèle, having first carefully lowered one of the venetian blinds that no glare might offend her cousin's eyes, proceeded to read her favorite book in a soft, measured cadence that suited it admirably. There was no stumbling over the old English words. Adèle was so thoroughly acquainted with the style that the quaint language came naturally from her lips, even with a kind of delicate grace. Love had given her the art, for she loved, more than any book she had ever read, this dreamy, old-world poem, with its fair women, its armed knights, its dragons and its myths. Perhaps the force of contrast made these things specially dear to the young girl's soul, for there was not much romance in the fashionable life her mother taught her to think the best and wisest of all lives for a nineteenth-century young lady to lead.

Her voice sounded like the echo of a dream in the wide room, and she herself, in her light summer dress, might well have answered to the description of one of the fair "maydes" whose woes and joys the gentle poet of another age has illumined with his silvery pen, while Arthur, as he rested on the sofa in an attitude of careless grace, his dark, lazy-looking eyes half closed, his head thrown back upon the cushions, might have been one of the brave young knights refreshing himself in his lady's bower after some terrible encounter with the many-headed, many-handed monster from whom it was his grand mission to free humanity in general, fair womankind in particular.

But the afternoon wore away. Adèle had just finished the account of a mighty encounter between Arthur of the magic sword and three unknightly knights who had attacked him together.

It had apparently aroused Arthur, for he rose suddenly and stood by her side, looking down upon her with a certain earnestness.

"Shut the book for the present, Adèle," he said, "I am ready to talk now; it has awoke me."

"What has awoke you, dear?"

"Your favorite poet, I suppose, my little cousin; but come, what were you so anxious to say to me when I came in just now?"

"Oh, Arthur, you cannot surely have forgotten. I wanted to speak to you about that beautiful fainting lady in the Academy."

"Perhaps I have *not* forgotten, Adèle." Arthur turned away from his cousin as he spoke, for he did not wish her to see the sudden flush which not all the proud consciousness of manhood and superiority had been strong enough to restrain.

"Well," he continued after a pause, as his cousin remained thoughtfully silent, "I *do* remember; but what of her?"

"I have been thinking of her, Arthur." Adèle's eyes looked sorrowful. "And whenever I think of her I remember those miserable houses, the shabby black dress and the quiet sadness in her face. Oh, Arthur, *do* you think it would be possible to help her in any way?"

"For you it might be," said Arthur with an appearance of sudden interest. "Unfortunately," he added bitterly, "women have the habit of looking upon any attempt at friendliness in one of the opposite sex as a species of insult."

This was rather too much for Adèle. With every respect for her cousin and fiancé, he was still too young, in her estimation, to be capable of exciting indignation in the breast of any woman. She laughed merrily: "I like your vanity, sir. As if any one could be insulted with you! You would have to pin on a false moustache, draw your hat over your brows to hide those ingenuous-looking eyes of yours, and button an enormous rough great coat up to your chin, before any one—any stranger, I mean—could imagine you even grown up. Why *I* look ages older than you!"

Adèle got up and looked at herself in the mirror.

"Yes, *ages!*" she repeated, with provoking emphasis and in eager expectation of a delightful torrent of self-vindication from her cousin. They often indulged in this kind of wordy war, and Adèle's feminine volubility and quickness of wit generally gave her the advantage.

No answer came from Arthur to the rash challenge. He was standing behind her, not looking into the mirror, but, as though utterly unconscious of her light words, gazing away into vacancy. Adèle caught sight of his face in the mirror, and a sudden silence seized her, for even as she spoke she saw that in her young cousin's face which warned her he was a boy no longer.

He had drawn himself up to his full height, and stood seemingly rapt in earnest thought, for his brows were slightly contracted, and his ingenuous-looking eyes had taken a deep, fixed look that strangely moved his cousin. With the quickness of a woman's insight she saw that her jest had been ill-timed, that a certain indescribable change, perhaps that for which she had hoped and longed, had come to the beautiful boy whom she had loved and caressed with almost maternal tenderness, for manhood's strength of purpose was written on his face. Her first feeling was a sense of foreboding. If Arthur was indeed changed, would he be changed to her?

The next was a determination, strong as the womanhood which with her love the young girl had put on early, to share his secret, whatever it might be.

She was too young and too inexperienced to understand all that this change, which she certainly felt, might mean; she could not reason about the new earnestness, nor trace it to any cause which he might think it well to hide, for Adèle was eminently generous and unsuspicious. She was accustomed to her cousin's light, boyish affection, and did not expect him to be a passionate lover; she was therefore ready with all her soul to rejoice in anything that would make him less frivolous, less absorbed in self and the mere enjoyment of life.

For a few moments she stood silently at the mirror, looking into it, but looking absently, for her mind was engaged in the problem of how to approach him, how to gain his confidence at this time which the young girl instinctively felt to be critical in her cousin's history. If he had ambitious dreams, was it not right that she should share them? She had always been his confidante; the bare idea, indeed, of being shut out from any of Arthur's secrets gave Adèle keen pain.

Deciding at last that frankness was her best policy, she turned to her cousin and putting both hands on his shoulders looked earnestly into his eyes. "Arthur," she said with a slight tremor in her voice, "what are you thinking about? Tell me."

He might have been called from a distant land, so great was the interval that separated his mind from hers at that moment, and at first he seemed even to have difficulty in recalling his scattered ideas.

She repeated the question, with an added earnestness that lent pathos to her voice.

Then he looked down upon her:

"Why do you wish so much to know, Adèle?"

"Oh, Arthur, how can you ask?" Her voice trembled, she was very near tears. "Dear," she continued in a lower voice, taking his hand in hers, "if I thought you had *one* corner in your heart of which I knew nothing, I scarcely know what I should do. 'Trust me all in all,' Arthur. I say it in all sincerity." She smiled faintly. "I promise not to be like that naughty Vivien, wrapping you up in spells, even if—if you should have any secret—"

"That would pain you very much to know, little cousin."

Adèle looked up bravely: "I should prefer to know it, Arthur—indeed I should; I think, dear—I *think*—I could put myself out of the question altogether, and help you as a sister might."

He did not notice the tremulousness, the slight choking of voice with which her brave little sentence ended.

"I wish with all my heart that you were my sister, Adèle: then I could tell you without any hesitation."

Adèle turned a little pale: "I *am* your sister, Arthur. Tell me"

He looked down upon her kindly: "I will tell you, Adèle, for in these matters I believe frankness to be the best policy; and, after all, it may be only a dream. I was thinking of Margaret Grey."

CHAPTER X.

HOW ADÈLE RECEIVES THE DISCLOSURE.

The woman who loves should indeed
Be the friend of the man that she loves. She should heed
Not her selfish and often mistaken desires,
But his interest whose fate her own interest inspires.

And this, then, was the awakening? Like almost every thing in this wayward world of ours, it scarcely chimed in with the ideas and plans that had been formed concerning it.

Adèle had often mourned her cousin's frivolity, but she was young and hopeful. He was only a boy, she had told herself. Some of the great things in the world—its art, its literature, its science, the grand sphere of politics or the grander field of benevolence—would sooner or later throw chains about his spirit, so that, following where it led, he too, with herself perhaps as a twin attendant star, like the "Laon and Laone" of Shelley, might take a place in the poet's divine temple of genius, and live a life not utterly in vain in its influences on humanity.

She had even thought to arouse him herself, that by love he might rise, as others had done before him, to something higher than the fashionable life of self-pleasing. But of this she had never thought—that love indeed, but the love of another woman, should be the motive-power rousing his soul to earnestness. For she could not be mistaken. The change that had come to him—which change, she could not but remember as she cast her thoughts over the past few days, had dated from that memorable afternoon at the Academy—the impressive way in which he had told her of his thought, the quiet earnestness of his manner, all tended to the revelation of a fact—one that she would have put away indignantly had she not been forced to look it in the face. Arthur was in love, and not with her.

The beautiful woman whom in her youthful enthusiasm she had admired—loved even for her very loveliness—had won her cousin's heart. He loved Margaret Grey as he had never loved her, his cousin, the friend of his youth and childhood: with *her* he had remained a boy; her beautiful rival had roused the dormant fire within him, and suddenly the boy had put on his manhood.

These were some of the thoughts that crowded bewilderingly on Adèle's brain as they sat together on the sofa—she and her cousin—with his strange confession between them. *He* was waiting to hear what she would say; *she* was for the first few moments unable to speak. On the table before them lay the forgotten volume of the *Faërie Queene;* at their feet, in sweet confusion, were the scattered flowers fallen from Adèle's lap. She sat perfectly still, her hands crossed and her eyes cast down; he looked at her with some earnestness, and perhaps a little surprise.

Arthur's affection for Adèle was of a calm, brotherly kind, and he had always imagined that she cared for him in very much the same manner.

Hitherto, indeed, he had not been in a position to gauge the heights and depths of that mysterious, volatile essence which young mortals dignify by the fair name of love. But now, with this new light in his own heart, he was better able to understand his cousin's, and in her downcast face he thought he read her secret.

It made him tender instantly. Young men and old men are alike in this. Whether loving or not themselves, they are pleased when they find out, by indubitable signs, that they have inspired the sentiment; and this knowledge makes them, for the moment, strangely gentle and sympathetic.

Arthur drew nearer to his cousin, and put his arm around her waist. To his surprise again, she pushed his arm gently aside.

"Not now, dear Arthur!" she said, in a soft, clear voice, lifting her blue eyes to his face; "I want you to tell me all about it."

"About what?" said Arthur, somewhat taken aback at the result of his impulsive frankness.

"Your love for Margaret Grey," she said gently, but not without a faint tremor in her voice.

"Did I say I *loved* her, Adèle?" It was Arthur's turn to speak with a trembling voice and flushed face, but these told his tale only too eloquently.

"Not in so many words," replied Adèle; "but, dear, you have revealed your secret, and I am glad. It was like yourself, Arthur—frank and true. I might have guessed it before, for she is beautiful as a dream, like the lady Una; and I can imagine so well how a man's heart would go out to that kind of sadness and helplessness. I wish I had been a man;" Adèle sighed as she spoke; "but, perhaps, as a woman I shall be able to help you more. Strange—isn't it?—I was thinking of her, her face haunted me so, and longing to find out more about her—all for her own sake; now I will do it for yours."

The words were spoken very quietly and with a certain determination, that Arthur found it very difficult to understand.

"But, Adèle," he stammered out, "you forget—"

"That you and I are betrothed in a kind of way—is that what you mean? Thank you for thinking of it; but I should be grieved for *that* to stand in your way." She smiled a rather watery smile. "I promised not to be like Vivien, so, rather than make a prison of my spells, I shall cast them all to the winds." Then, more gravely, "We were too young, Arthur—I told my mother so—too young to know our own minds, as people say—at least you were." Here Adèle stopped suddenly; she was on the point of betraying the secret which—brave little maiden!—she thought she had preserved so well. But her calmness had reassured Arthur.

"You are right, Adèle," he answered gravely—and for the moment, with the unreasoning impulse of womanhood, she hated him for his quick acquiescence—"we were both too young; we had seen too little of the world; and even now I scarcely know how we ought to act. Our engagement has been announced; then my aunt—"

Adèle smiled faintly: "It will be best to say nothing to mamma at present, nor to anybody; we can surely be what we have been to one another—brother and sister; we have never been more—we could not wish to be less."

There was a tinge of bitterness in Adèle's voice as she said the last words, but the ears of very young men, when not quickened by any stronger feeling than brotherly affection, are not swift to catch these slight intonations.

"You must let me be your friend and confidante, Arthur," she continued more gently; "I shall still like to be the first to know everything that nearly concerns you."

Her gentleness touched Arthur. He took one of her hands in his: "You shall always be what you are to me, Adèle—my dearest friend and counsellor. I shall come to you for advice and sympathy."

She rose, and stooping began to collect the fallen flowers—a pretext only, for the tears were beginning to force their way to her eyes, and she was determined to show no weakness in her cousin's presence.

"My poor flowers!" she said lightly, "they have been forgotten: go and fetch another vase from the breakfast-room, like a good old fellow. I have filled all here, and I want these up stairs."

By the time her cousin had returned with the vase Adèle was herself again. Grouping the flowers delicately, with clever fingers well accustomed to this kind of work, she began her gentle catechism: "Have you seen her again, Arthur?"

Perhaps it was a relief to him to unburden himself, to pour out to another the torrent of self-condemnation that had been oppressing him.

"Don't ask me, Adèle," he said, pacing the room excitedly.

"I am a wretch—a fool—an idiot! I mistook *her*—think of it! I wonder will she ever be able to bear the sight of me again? I took the advice of a villain, who knows nothing whatever about women like her."

"What *can* you mean, Arthur?" broke in Adèle, whose flowers had fallen from her hands in her astonishment.

He did not seem to hear the interruption. "I did knowingly what I knew would offend her," he continued, clenching his fists and drawing his brows together, as though challenging himself for his misconduct.

Adèle sighed: "I *wish* you would explain yourself, dear."

"Explain myself!" Arthur came suddenly down from the heroic with a little laugh: "Ah, yes, by the bye, you don't know, and really it's not a very creditable story. Well—to make a clean breast of it—I went to the Academy yesterday. *She* was there, and I had the happiness of seeing her. She didn't see me, but while I was looking at her with feelings that you can imagine, Captain Mordaunt came up behind me."

"Not at all a good companion for you, dear," interrupted Adèle with the wise air of a little mother, but blushing, girl like, as she spoke, for Captain Mordaunt was an admirer of hers: he had once or twice seized a quiet opportunity of looking into her blue eyes in a way that offended as much as it bewildered her. "Please have nothing to do with him, Arthur," she continued pleadingly.

"Why, Adèle, what have you against Captain Mordaunt? I thought you had only met him once or twice."

"That once or twice was enough. He is one of those men who believe in nothing good, who seem to delight in the wickedness of the world. I always think such people must be particularly bad themselves. But it's no use reasoning about it. I dislike Captain Mordaunt."

"A case, in fact, of 'I do not like you, Doctor Fell,'" put in Arthur provokingly. "I shall send him to you when he wants a character, Adèle; but, do you know, amongst ladies your opinion would be considered rather singular? I certainly have never been able to see what they find to admire in him."

"Nor I, and I must say I pity their taste; he's ugly and conceited. But what did he say about her—Margaret Grey, I mean?"

Arthur's manner grew excited again: "What he said was not so bad as what he implied with his odious hints. I was idiot enough to listen to him, to believe him partially. I disobeyed her, Adèle, and called on her in that wretched place at Islington."

Adèle looked up bewildered: "But I can't see why that should offend her. Of course you were never properly introduced, but then the circumstances were peculiar, and she must have seen that we were tolerably respectable people."

"What a simple, innocent little girl you are, Adèle!" said Arthur rather grandly. "You see what I say is quite true—with all your romantic notions you know nothing whatever of the world. I can't very well explain, as you don't seem to understand; but, anyway, what I did was very stupid and wrong, and she showed me that in a moment. Oh, if I could tell you how she looked—so beautiful, so sad!"

The remembrance was overpowering. Arthur hid his burning face in both his hands, and Adèle was silent. To her pure young heart this passion, which an older and more experienced woman would certainly have laughed to scorn, was a sacred thing.

"She forgave me," he continued after a pause. "She said I would soon *forget* the infatuation."

There was a mournful incredulity in the boy's voice to which the young girl's heart responded. That he could ever *forget* the infatuation seemed, for the moment, as impossible to one cousin as to the other.

Neither of them spoke for some minutes, then Adèle raised to her cousin a face that was streaming with tears. "I can't help it, Arthur," she said simply, "and please don't think it's for myself. I have everything to make me happy. I was thinking of you and of her. You know they say women's wits are sharper than men's in these matters. I will try and help you in some way, for you *must* meet her again, dear; but just now everything seems confused. Mamma expects you to dinner, so you had better go home at once and dress. I can easily arrange for a quiet talk in the course of the evening, and then perhaps I shall have thought of some plan, for we must lose no time, as I know she is only staying temporarily in London."

She said it all in a broken way through the tears she could not keep back. He tried to kiss her then, but she slipped out of his arms.

Poor child! The aching at her heart was too great to be borne any longer. She finished her cry in her own room, but what she had said was true—it was not all for herself.

The beautiful lonely stranger and her cousin's passion, which her woman's insight told her was not very hopeful, had their share in causing her sorrow. She could not indulge long, however, in the luxury of tears. She too had to make her dinner-toilet, and that evening her mother was not the only person at the dinner-table who thought she looked even fairer than usual.

CHAPTER XI.

A FACE AT THE WINDOW.

Sympathy
Must call her in love's name, and then, I know,
She rises up and brightens as she should,
And lights her smile for comfort, and is slow
In nothing of high-hearted fortitude.

Adèle kept her word. She set her wits to work with such good effect that the next morning found her and her cousin in the carriage, under the conduct of the stately coachman, on their way to that unfashionable locality, the neighborhood of Islington.

They had started, presumably, on a shopping excursion, the delusion being maintained by two or three stoppages in Regent street, after which, by Arthur's direction, they drove to the vicinity of The Angel, where carriage and coachman were left in waiting, the remainder of the way being made on foot for the sake of the preservation of their secret.

It had been agreed between them that Adèle should pay a visit to Margaret, Arthur waiting for her at the entrance of the narrow street where she lodged. The object of her visit was in the present instance only to inquire after Mrs. Grey's health, to take a kindly interest in her welfare, and to try and persuade her to accept their offer of friendship: it had been decided between them that upon this occasion Arthur's name should not be mentioned. Adèle had taken upon herself the office of simply paving the way for further intercourse—of preventing Mrs. Grey from escaping them altogether. This, with her quiet tact and gentle sympathy, she did not despair of accomplishing, if fate would only be commonly propitious, for Adèle was really in earnest. Putting self out of the way, she had thrown herself heart and soul into her cousin's scheme, and all the more readily, it may be, from the affection which had arisen spontaneously in her own heart at the sight of Margaret's pure, calm beauty.

Adèle was only eighteen, and eighteen is an impressionable age, open not only to accesses of what is called the tender passion, but to feelings perhaps much tenderer and fairer, for the souls of the very young, especially among women, are keenly susceptible to the subtle influences of beauty and grace; it is not uncommon for a young girl to be deeply, jealously enamored of one of her own sex; to experience the delights, the tremors, the anxieties of love itself, and far more palpably than in any of the necessary flirtations that diversify her budding womanhood. Beauty is the embodiment of the young girl's dream, and beauty she finds more visibly in her own sex than in the other.

The first loving emotion of Milton's Eve was for the fair watery image that represented herself in all the radiant charms of female loveliness. It was only afterward that she discovered

"How beauty is excelled by manly grace,
And wisdom, which alone is truly fair."

Adèle was in this first stage, and Margaret seemed to her the living embodiment of all that had so often won and fascinated her in poetry and romance. The evident mystery that surrounded the fair stranger, her sadness, her lonely friendless position, all added to the spell.

The first emotion of wounded self-love over, Adèle ceased to wonder at Arthur's desertion, or even to grieve over it, and was ready to go through fire and water for their common divinity.

In spite of her grand resolutions, however, she felt rather nervous when, Arthur having been left at the top of the dull-looking row of houses, she stood alone on the doorstep of the one indicated by him, inquiring for Mrs. Grey.

Mrs. Grey was at home. The servant-girl threw open the door of the small sitting-room without previous warning, and showed Margaret herself on her knees before an obstinate trunk, which apparently refused to be fastened. At the sound of the opening door she rose in some embarrassment, looked at the card which the girl had thrust into her hand, and then at Adèle, who was standing, with some hesitation in her manner, on the threshold of the room. The card had been an enigma, but Adèle's pleasant girlish face solved it in a moment.

"Come in," she said warmly, going forward to meet her. "It is exceedingly kind of you to have thought of paying me a visit; but you find me in great disorder. Let me see," looking round the room; "I must try and find you an unoccupied chair."

"Forgive me," said Adèle with gentle courtesy. "I know it is too early for a call, but ever since we met the other day I have been so anxious to see you once more, and this is the only time in the day when I can manage to come so far."

She blushed as she spoke, and Margaret was too kind to add to her embarrassment by any expression of surprise at her unexpected visit. She smiled pleasantly, and sat down by her side. "I am only too delighted to see you, my dear Miss Churchill; my visitors are never numerous, and they do not always come on such pleasant errands as yours. You see I am preparing for flight; I can really stand London no onger."

Adèle's sympathetic eyes were fixed on Margaret's face. She gave a little sigh: "Yes, I am sure it must be very lonely for you, living all by yourself here."

"Sometimes it is, I must confess. In my present home, a seaside village, I know most of the country-people, and I have my little Laura to go about with me. Then (at least this is *my* feeling) the loneliness of the country is very different from the loneliness of towns."

"I can *quite* understand that," said Adèle earnestly, "although I have very little experience of loneliness of any kind. I sometimes wish, indeed, to have a little more time to myself. But I must not forget what specially brought me here to-day. My cousin and I have been very anxious about you, Mrs. Grey, for your fainting-fit lasted so long we feared it was the commencement of a serious illness."

Margaret smiled: "Thanks to your timely help, my dear Miss Churchill, I have felt no after ill effects whatever. I scarcely know how it might have been with me had I had to find my way home alone; but it all arose from my own stupidity. The time passed so rapidly in the picture-galleries that I forgot all about lunch. When I reached home I remembered that breakfast had been my only meal that day. My faintness must have been caused by want of food, so you see it was not very interesting after all."

She spoke the words lightly, but Adèle wondered with a sudden pang whether the want of food had anything to do with her poverty, for the interior of the shabby-looking house confirmed her worst fears. To put up with such a miserable place could be the result of nothing but dire necessity.

Her voice was very tender as she spoke again after a little pause, laying her hand affectionately on Margaret's arm and looking up earnestly into her pale, sad face: "Dear Mrs. Grey, you look very delicate, indeed you do; you should take more care of yourself."

Perhaps it was the sympathy that shone out of the young girl's glistening eyes, a human longing for something like this warm young love, that seemed to be offering itself so spontaneously, or a sudden sickness of the self-contained life she had been leading, for Adèle's gentle words and gestures broke the crust of calm reserve with which Margaret had striven to surround herself. "Ah, child," she said, tears in her eyes and in her voice, "it is for the young and happy to take care of themselves; their lives are precious. From mine too much of the sweetness has gone to make it worthy of preservation. How strange it is! I used to live and to enjoy life; now, even pleasures are like apples of Sodom—

they turn to dust and ashes in my mouth. I feel inclined to write 'Vanity of vanities' upon everything." She smiled through her tears: "I should not speak of such things to you."

But tears, real, large, glistening tears, were in Adèle's eyes. "Why not?" she said impetuously. Then, after another pause, for though the young can give tears to sorrow, they are helpless very often to give words (if they only knew it, how much more eloquent those tears are than the after commonplaces with which the world teaches them to treat suffering!), "Oh, Mrs. Grey, I wish I could help you in some way. Will you let me be your friend?"

Margaret smiled: "You have done me good already, dear; your sympathy is very sweet, and especially, I think, to me, for it brings back to my mind a time when sympathy was never wanting. I had a friend once, but she has gone, like other beautiful things, out of my life."

"Tell me about her," said Adèle.

Margaret shook her head: "No, no; enough of miseries for one day. I scarcely know when I have talked so much about myself; and do you know I am the least bit in the world curious?"

"What about, Mrs. Grey?"

"I want you to tell me honestly what brought you here to-day."

Adèle blushed. "Please don't be vexed with me, or think that my visit was from idle curiosity. What I say is really true," her admiration shone out of her eyes as she spoke: "ever since I saw you in the Academy, your face has haunted me. You know one reads of those kinds of attraction. Have you any spells, Mrs. Grey? I could not rest, in fact, until I had seen you once more."

Margaret was sitting near the window, a faint smile, half of pleasure, half of surprise, on her lips as she listened to Adèle's impulsive words, but before she could frame an answer they both became aware by a sudden intuition—the effect of that inexplicable mesmeric power which the human eye possesses—that they were being watched. Instinctively they looked out. A tall, dark-looking man, somewhat of an *élégant* in his appearance, was leaning quietly on the small iron railings that skirted the area and kitchen steps. In this position his chin was on a level with the top of the muslin blind; he could have a full view of all that took place in the room.

He was availing himself without stint or scruple of the advantage.

CHAPTER XII.

FLIGHT.

Next a lover—with a dream
'Neath his waking eyelids hidden,
And a frequent sigh unbidden,
And an idlesse all the day,
And a silence that is made
Of a word he dares not say.

ADÈLE gave a little scream. She looked at Margaret. Her face had turned as pale as ashes. She had not generally much color, but this was no ordinary pallor: a gray, livid look seemed to spread itself gradually over her features till even her lips were blanched. For a moment she seemed to be stunned. Then she rose, apparently with difficulty, and leaning forward on the window-sash seized the blind to put it between themselves and the audacious watcher.

He did not wait for it to be drawn down. Turning slowly, he passed away down the quiet street, but before he did so, Adèle saw that his lips curled themselves into a mocking smile. Astonishment and a vague sense of alarm had rendered her helpless for the moment. When the blind was drawn down and the man had gone, she leapt to her feet and threw both her arms round Margaret's waist, for, leaning still as if for support against the window-sash, Adèle saw that her friend was tottering, and that in her widely-opened eyes there was a dazed, bewildered look. She drew her down gently to the nearest seat, then, kneeling by her side, rubbed one of her cold hands in both her own. "Mrs. Grey, what is it?" she cried almost piteously. "Can I do anything for you?"

Her voice seemed to arouse Margaret. She passed one of her hands over her forehead. "Was it a dream?" she said in a faint, low voice. "I thought I saw him; and I had vowed, sworn that he should never set eyes on me again; and he was smiling, I thought, a mocking, triumphant smile, such as—" Then suddenly she caught sight of the lowered blind: "Why did I draw down the blind? the sun is not on the street. Ah yes," with a heavy sigh, "I remember now. He was standing there—he has tracked me; but, thank God! I am not at home. I am in big, endless London. He shall find out no further; I will leave this place at once. Oh! Maurice, Maurice!"

It might have been the cry of a tormented spirit passed away for ever from hope and peace and joy. The misery of those last words was so deep and poignant that the young girl shuddered.

She could not speak: she knelt helpless by her friend's side, not even attempting consolation, while Margaret, covering her face with both hands, wept hot tears, that streamed through her fingers and on to Adèle's hand, which rested still upon her knees. And so they remained for a few moments—moments that seemed ages to poor Adèle; then, unable to bear it longer, she rose to her feet, and putting her arms round Margaret's neck kissed her on the brow. It was the impulsive movement of a helpless sympathy, a girl-like action. She could not help, but she could comfort.

Mrs. Grey had forgotten her presence. The touch aroused her. She looked up suddenly, and shaking off the flowing tears took the young girl's hands in hers. "Poor child!" she said gently, "it is too bad of me to frighten you like this. I fear I am very selfish and forgetful; but you know nothing—God grant you never may!—of miseries like mine. And now—will you think me ungrateful?—I fear I must ask you to leave me. It is necessary for me to go from here at once. And yet," she continued meditatively, "if you *could* stay till the last; he might return—"

"I shall not think of leaving you till I see you out of this place, Mrs. Grey," said Adèle authoritatively. "Listen," she continued, more rapidly; "I can arrange it all. I told you before of my talent for management, and now it has all come into my head quite suddenly. Ah, I should have made a first-rate diplomatist. You want to escape this rude man, and no wonder. If you do as I say we shall be off in a quarter of an hour. Leave your boxes with their address; I can see to their being sent after you. I see they are nearly packed. My cousin is at the end of the street waiting for me; he will fetch the carriage, which is only a few yards distant, and we can drive you to any station you like to mention. There you can take a ticket—not, if you like, to your own village, but to some place at no great distance, in case this man should follow us, and to-morrow you can go on to your own home."

There was something enlivening in Adèle's energy. Margaret's face brightened, she wiped away the remaining tears, and turning aside renewed the struggle which Adèle's entrance had interrupted with the obstinate trunk.

"Your plan would be perfection but for one thing," she said with the quiet dignity which had characterized her before this excitement had come. "My dear Miss Churchill, forgive me, you are young. I am a total stranger to you. Your mother, your friends—would they not be displeased? Is it right for you to do this?"

"It is, it is," said Adèle eagerly; "indeed, dear Mrs. Grey, mamma allows me to go everywhere with Arthur. She has full confidence in him."

"And Arthur?"

"Is my cousin. You saw him the other day. He is waiting for me now." In spite of herself Adèle blushed as she spoke.

Margaret looked at her in some surprise, but the ingenuous young face told its own tale. In her turn she was filled with admiration and love. She held out her hand. "Thank you," she said. That was all for a moment, as the tears were ready to flow; then after a pause, "What you have seen to-day will tell you more eloquently than I could that neither you nor your friends need have any fear on my account. If Arthur should become unmanageable at any future time, send him to me; I promise to cure him. And now, dear, I suppose we must be setting to work; I will accept your kind offer: it seems, after all, the best course to pursue."

It was done without the slightest awkwardness.

Margaret might have been a queen accepting a favor from one of her courtiers, and it was in this light that Adèle thought of the service she was rendering to her friend, for Margaret was, in her young, inexperienced eyes, a very queen by means of her beauty and charm. And then they set themselves to work without further delay. In a very few moments Margaret's hasty toilette was complete—a black shawl, the little close bonnet, a crape veil, the bright Indian scarf, from which she did not seem to care to separate herself, a tiny morocco-leather case, which might contain valuables of some kind, and a carpet-bag, which by Adèle's aid had been hastily filled with a few necessaries,—these were all; then the boxes were locked and labelled, the landlady's account was settled, and orders given to her to keep the boxes until they should be called for, Adèle promising that Arthur should perform this little service. It did not take very long. Adèle had scarcely been half an hour in the house when they left it together, Margaret closely veiled and not venturing to look around, Adèle gazing right and left to assure herself that they were not followed. Not a person was in sight on either side of the way, and she breathed more freely.

Arthur meanwhile had been pacing the thoroughfare upon which the street in which Mrs. Grey had been lodging opened out. He was not very impatient, for his head had been full of Margaret; he had been forming and reforming, always unsuccessfully to himself, her image in his brain, and dreaming all kinds of mad dreams about the services he would render her in the future, and the sweet returns of love and gratitude he might be blest enough to gain. Adèle's concurrence in his plans was, he felt, a grand step in the right direction; thenceforth everything would go swimmingly, for it was not possible that she could set aside Adèle's offered friendship—indeed, the very length of time that was elapsing was a favorable sign.

But, not even in his wildest dreams, had he imagined that he should see her again that very day, that the means of doing her a service would immediately be put into his hands; when, therefore, he saw two ladies instead of one emerging from —— street, he was beyond measure astonished.

They stopped to let him reach them, and, rather embarrassed through all his delight, he offered his greeting to Margaret Grey. She was herself calm and quiet, only the heightened color in her beautiful face betraying in any way a sign of her recent emotion.

Adèle was by far the more excited of the two. "Fetch the carriage, Arthur," she said, "as quickly as ever you can. We shall follow slowly to the place where we left it; you can come back with it to meet us. Don't stop to ask why, like a good old fellow. There's no time to lose."

It was evidently for Margaret, so Arthur started off at such headlong speed that many of the foot-passengers stood still to look after him, wondering at his excitement. If some of his languid friends in that other world, London of the West, could have seen him, I greatly fear he would have been degraded for ever in their estimation; undue activity or a public display of ultra eagerness is not among the list of fashionable failings; in fact, it is bad form. But Arthur did not think at the moment of his position in the world of fashion, and it was not likely that any of his friends would have been benighted enough to put such a space as that which separates Islington from Hyde Park between themselves and their daily haunts.

Breathless he hailed the coachman, who crossed the street with unusual alacrity. He could only imagine from Mr. Arthur's state of excitement that Miss Adèle had fallen down in a fit or that some similar misfortune had happened. He was an old servant, and took, as he often said in the servants' hall, "a deep hinterest in the family."

"Nothing wrong sir, I 'ope," he said, stooping down confidentially from his exalted position on the top of the coach-box.

"No," replied Arthur impatiently. "Drive me along this road until I tell you to stop."

He jumped in, and the mystified coachman obeyed, stopping instinctively at the sight of his young mistress with a person carrying a carpet-bag. Even if Arthur had not used the check-string vigorously, astonishment would have brought the worthy man to a stand-still. Imagination was not his strong point, and it was difficult for him even to conceive what all this meant.

"The Great Northern Station, and then home," said Adèle, not wishing to mystify him too far; "and *please* drive quickly."

He obeyed, and as easily and rapidly they drove along the streets Margaret leant back among the cushions, closed her eyes and sighed deeply. It was a sigh of intense relief. "To-morrow," she said—"to-morrow I shall be at home."

Very little more passed between the three until the carriage stopped before the station; there Adèle held out her hand very reluctantly. "I am afraid I must say good-bye," she said gently; "I ought to be at home. Mamma will be expecting me. I shall leave Arthur to take care of you and see you into your carriage." With a glance Margaret thanked Adèle for her noble trustfulness.

"We shall meet again?" said the young girl earnestly.

"I trust so, dear; you know my address. If anything should bring you in my direction I shall be only too delighted to see you; but," and her voice grew low and tender, "if we never should meet again, remember this—I shall *never* cease to thank you in my heart for the way in which you have acted to-day."

She had got out of the carriage and was standing near the door, one hand still in Adèle's, who seemed to wish to retain it to the last moment. Arthur was beside them, looking interested but helpless, and once more tempted to indulge in that very vain and foolish wish that Providence had made him a woman.

Here was his cousin already Margaret Grey's dear friend: he was nothing to her—a lacquey who might be permitted to see after luggage, to get her ticket, to wait upon her. Nothing! Was that nothing? he asked himself suddenly as Adèle closed the carriage door, waved her last farewell and left him alone with Margaret in the busy station. Alone and in a crowd, he her protector, she dependent upon him, he was a man at once, gentle, thoughtful, considerate, ready for any emergency. Only there was one drawback. All his attentions were received so pleasantly, in such a matter-of-fact way—not as a something that was offered personally, a tribute of homage to her whom he admired above all other women, but as the most commonplace thing in the world, a lady's right from the gentleman who has taken upon himself the task of helping her.

The fact was that Margaret Grey knew more of the world than her shabby black dress and general want of style might have seemed to indicate. Certain it is that she had hit upon the very best method of keeping her young knight in his true place.

His heart was burning to show in some way the enthusiasm that devoured him as he stood by her side on the platform, only venturing to glance at her furtively from time to time, but abundantly laden with her small items of property, of all of which she had allowed him to possess himself without the smallest demur. None of this did he dare to show. He could feel in anticipation the look of quiet surprise with which she would greet any presumptuous speech.

Curious glances were cast on them by those who were not too busy in the important stages of arrival and departure to give a thought to anything but their own concerns, for Margaret was one of those women who always attract notice, and once or twice, when she became conscious of such observation, Arthur saw that she started painfully and turned to scan the watcher. He cast his scowls to the right hand and to the left, being quite ready to pick a quarrel with any one for the sake of his divinity; but his scowls were shed abroad in vain; they did not seem to have the slightest effect upon the situation, and at last all necessity for such exercise of his faculties was over. The train, longed for so eagerly by the one, dreaded by the other of these two companions of an hour, came slowly, with majestic quiet, into the station; porters, with anything but majestic quiet, began to bundle and bustle the unfortunate luggage into the vans, lady passengers rushed madly from various corners of the station, gentlemen passengers walked leisurely with a defiant look at the engine (it could not start without them) from the refreshment-rooms, where they had been taking in a stock of strength that might enable them to live through the ennui of a six hours' journey; parties that were about to part gathered woefully together, tears in the eyes of some, an appearance of put-on sadness, covering satisfaction, in the faces of others, and sounding along the line came the voice of the stately guard, "Take your places, ladies and gentlemen."

Then Margaret put out her hand. They had stopped together before a second-class carriage, in which, with all the deference of a young courtier, Arthur had taken her seat, arranged her parcels, placed everything she might need within her reach, even to the little packet of delicate ham sandwiches, flask of sherry and magazine of light reading which he had obtained surreptitiously to add to her comfort during the journey.

She smiled when she got in and saw what he had done. "Thank you," she said, still in the same easy, pleasant way, a queen addressing her subject; "I chose my knight well; and now good-bye. Tell your cousin that I will send her a few lines to let her know of my safe arrival."

Arthur pressed the hand she held out to him. He could not resist it, and then, shriek! puff! the waving of a flag, and the train was gone, carrying her away from his lingering gaze. He turned aside with a sigh and a singular contraction of heart; she, looking round at his thoughtful arrangements, smiled faintly, then, leaning back on the hard seat, closed her eyes and murmured almost audibly, "Thank God! escaped!"

Her thanksgiving, perhaps, was premature, for in her late dwelling-place this was what was happening in the mean time. She and Adèle had scarcely reached the top of ——— street before the landlady, anxious to lose no time, ordered "Apartments" to be hoisted in its usual place, the front-parlor window.

A tall, dark-looking man, who was walking in a leisurely manner down the street with a cigar in his mouth, stopped suddenly and looked at it with some attention. From below the landlady looked at him, and feeling his earnestness prophetic arrayed herself hastily in clean cap and apron, and smoothed from her brow the unquiet look which Betsy's awkwardness had caused. She did not get herself up in vain; he rang the bell and asked to see her rooms.

The landlady dropped a curtsey. This was a grand-looking gentleman in her opinion, with a fine commanding manner—"looked a mili*tairy* hofficer retired," she said afterward to a neighbor, describing the interview. "They're not in the best of horder, sir," she said deprecatingly—"not for a gentleman the likes of you to see; but there," fearful of losing a lodger, "it *hain't* all gold as glitters, and if so be has you'll make hallowances, the lady—quite a lady and lived very quiet, not gone above half an hour—says she, a going out of that door, and a givin' me of her hand—"

"Show me the rooms as they are," broke in the gentleman, frowning with impatience; but even this did not check the flow of the landlady's eloquence.

"The lady as has gone—" she began.

"Show me the rooms, woman, without any more jabber," interrupted he so fiercely that, as Mrs. Jones said afterward to a neighbor, "she was all of a tremble, and her feet as nigh as possible giv' way under her from fright."

She did not hazard another remark, but threw open the door of Margaret's sitting-room, still warm, as it were, with the evidences of her presence. The sight appeared to excite the gentleman; he breathed hard and his eyes sparkled; then, not appearing to notice the landlady, who stood respectfully in the doorway, he cast round the room one searching glance.

It seemed to satisfy him. He turned to the landlady, took out his pocket-book and pencil, as if to make a note of her answers, and asked, "Your name, Mrs.—"

"Jones, sir, at your service," she answered, curtseying.

"Mrs. Jones? ah!" He wrote down something in his pocket-book, then looked at her again: "Your rent?"

"Thirty shillin's *hand* hextras," she replied, audaciously clapping on ten shillings for the military appearance.

"Ah!" he answered once more, nothing else; no bargaining, as Mrs. Jones informed her next-door neighbor, nothing of the kind; he only shut up his pocket-book with a snap and turned aside, apparently quite satisfied. Mrs. Jones flattered herself that his satisfaction arose from prepossession with her rooms and her personal appearance. Quite other was the consideration that caused the prospective lodger such a pleasant glow of satisfaction.

Something indeed was written down in his note-book by that busy-looking pencil. It was not Mrs. Jones's name and address, nor even her exceedingly moderate terms.

If the solitary lady who was leaving London that day to hide her sorrow and loneliness could only have known what was written there, her satisfaction would have flown, for she had left her secret behind her, tacked in large letters to the boxes that were to follow her the next day, and the secret had been transferred to the pocket-book of the man she thought she had escaped.

Poor Adèle's diplomacy! It had given way at only one point, but unhappily that point was all important.

CHAPTER XIII.

LESSONS IN WORLD-WISDOM.

With a little hoard of maxims preaching down a daughter's heart;
They were dangerous guides, the feelings: she herself was not exempt.

"WELL, Adèle, what have you done with Arthur?"

The speaker was a comely, elderly lady who had sailed, in the full magnificence of brocade and lace, into the dining-room of her handsome house. A substantial lunch was on the table, an obsequious butler was in waiting, a fair-haired girl was seated in one of the arm-chairs, her head resting on her hand.

At the sound of her mother's voice she looked up. "Dropped him *en route*, mamma," she said pleasantly.

"And why did you not bring him in?"

"He had business, I believe, in town."

"Business, indeed! You should be his first business. Mark my words, Adèle—though it seems impossible to instill worldly wisdom into *your* brain—boys are volatile and require keeping in hand. A girl ought to be tolerably *exigeante* if she would either make or keep a conquest, especially when a boy of Arthur's age and character is in question." Then to the butler: "Take the covers, James; after that you can go down stairs. Miss Churchill and I will wait upon ourselves to-day. One always forgets James," she continued as he retired, "he is so quiet and unobtrusive; but then—faithful creature!—I feel very sure *he* could make no mischief of anything he hears."

"I wish, all the same, mamma," said Adèle rather fretfully, "that you would not always talk of my affairs and Arthur's before the servants. Burton, James, Elizabeth, it seems not to matter at all before which of them you speak."

"My dear Adèle, you are a child. These people know your character and mine, and are pretty well acquainted with all our affairs, without our taking the trouble of informing them. I wonder who leaves Arthur's letters about sometimes."

"Arthur's letters?" Adèle shrugged her shoulders almost imperceptibly. "All the world is at liberty to see them."

"There it is again, my dear; we return to the subject we were discussing a few minutes ago. When do you intend to make a lover of your cousin? You know you cannot possibly remain in this brother-and-sisterly stage. You must give him one or two lessons or he'll slip through your fingers yet."

Adèle was accustomed to her mother's style of conversation, so it did not particularly shock her; she only smiled rather strangely: "Arthur wants no lessons from *me*, mamma."

"Ah! then you are further advanced than I thought; but really, Adèle, you have been brought up so simply I wonder sometimes if you know at all what it means to have a lover. *I* was very different with *my* first lover, a cousin too, though we didn't marry after all. A very good thing; he was poor and idle: I should have been a wretched woman. Now, Arthur is well off, and not at all extravagant; no strong tastes either; just the kind of man whom a woman can mould to her will; but then she must know how, and I fear, Adèle, you are a sad baby in these matters."

"It's not for want of instruction, mamma," said Adèle rather maliciously.

But the good-natured Mrs. Churchill scarcely saw the point of her daughter's satire. "You are right," she said. "I have done my *very* best to instill into your mind some knowledge of the world you live in, Adèle. I considered it a duty," she sighed faintly. "Had your poor father been alive, the case might have been different. Women who are thrown on their own resources, like you and me, my child, *must* be equal to the task of taking care of themselves."

It was a task in which, apparently, Mrs. Churchill had never failed: she did not certainly look the worse for care and anxiety. She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes—a habit, simply, for not the faintest moisture was there to remove, but to mention the departed Mr. Churchill without paying this tribute of regard to his dear memory would have been most unseemly. A pause for this trivial operation then Mrs. Churchill continued: "I have wished for some time to speak to you about this matter, Adèle. I have managed for you so far; I can do so no further."

The last words seemed to astonish the young girl. She looked up: "*You* have managed, mamma? What *can* you mean?"

Why, little goose! to whom do you think you owe your lover? Not to Arthur, certainly. He would have gone on droning about the house for ever, without the slightest consideration for your feelings or mine, engrossing you and shutting out others. I brought him to book and showed him his duty." (The fond mother showed her white teeth at the remembrance.) "When they were all laying themselves out to entrap him, too! Lady Lacy and her pretty nieces, Mrs. Campbell and her ugly daughters; even gaunt Mr. Godolphin, with that extensive motherless child of his. Ha! ha! it was *too* good!"

But Adèle did not seem to join in her mother's mirth. She had dropped her knife and fork in a kind of despair, while a sudden pallor, quickly succeeded by a vivid flush, showed her distress.

"Good gracious, child! what is wrong?" cried her mother.

Her answer was given through a flood of tears: "Oh, mamma! mamma! how could you? And I was so happy, and I thought he liked me a little—only a very little—and that, in spite of everything, it might be all right some day? Now—now—"

The last part of the sentence was lost in the folds of her pocket-handkerchief.

Poor Adèle was rather upset with the events of the morning, following as they did upon the knowledge of what she looked upon as Arthur's desertion; to hear now that even their engagement, in which she had rejoiced as a proof of his real affection for her, as a kind of pledge for his return, was due not to his own unbiassed freedom of choice, but to her mother's machinations,—this was a kind of finishing-stroke to her misfortunes. She continued to sob, somewhat to her mother's annoyance.

"What a perfect baby you are still, Adèle!" she said; "it's well, after all, that I sent James out of the room. Come, dry up your eyes, and tell me what is the meaning of this. To say that anything I told you just now could have caused such an outburst is perfectly absurd. What has Arthur been saying or doing? *I* shall have to take him in hand."

Adèle lifted up her glistening eyes and carmine cheeks from the grateful shade of her pocket-handkerchief. "You must do nothing of the kind, mamma," she said indignantly —she was quite unlike herself for the moment—"you have done mischief enough already."

"Mischief enough!" Mrs. Churchill's glass paused halfway between the table and her lips; she was absolutely petrified with surprise. Adèle was an only daughter, and something of a spoilt child; but hitherto she had always been gentle and obedient, for she was naturally docile; then she and her mother had such different tastes that their wills very seldom clashed. This vigorous assertion of personality was a new thing, and for the moment clever, good-natured Mrs. Churchill, with all the knowledge of human nature upon which she plumed herself, scarcely knew how to treat it.

"This is what comes of romantic notions," she said severely. "I always thought the poetry-reading bad; if this kind of thing goes on I shall have to put a stop to it altogether. Now-a-days it seems to be the idea for young ladies and gentlemen to fall desperately in love, indulge in pretty poetic love-scenes and do a little wasting away for the benefit of one another. I suppose something of this has got into your silly little head, Adèle. You and Arthur should have been moved spontaneously to fall into one another's arms, like the hero and heroine of a play. Bah, child! there's a behind-the-scenes to life as well as the stage, and lovers are generally only puppets; they *act* the drama and other people pull the strings. Don't look so very woebegone: I tell you more than half the marriages in the world would never have taken place without some such helping hand as mine. You ought to be grateful instead of indignant."

Adèle had dried her eyes. She was rather ashamed of her outburst; she ought to have known long ago that her mother's matter-of-fact nature and keen common sense would never chime in with her own ultra-refined, high-flown notions of life and action; and hers, after all, were the ideas of a young girl to whom the great world was still a land of visions and dreams; her mother's were those of a woman who knew something of the world, who had passed through very varied experiences, who, with all her good-nature—for Mrs. Churchill was what might have been called a comfortable matron—had grown a little hard and unsympathetic by reason of the rubs and raps she had encountered, making some of her fine gold dim.

"We need not discuss the matter," said Adèle; "what is done *is* done, and after all perhaps it makes very little difference in the end. I am sorry if I was rude to you, mamma, as no doubt you do what you think best for me; but in these matters I do wish that you would let me have *some* voice. If I had known Arthur's proposal was brought about by you, I should have certainly refused him without any hesitation."

"So I supposed, my dear; therefore I was wise enough not to let either of the wise young people see my hand. Why, you romantic child! without me you would soon float on to misery. Grand notions are all very well in their way, but they can scarcely carry one through the world with any satisfaction to one's self, Adèle; you'll find that out sooner or later. But come, enough of worldly wisdom for one day. Wash your eyes and make yourself look nice; I want you to pay some visits with me this afternoon."

Poor little Adèle! she obeyed, but it was with a languid step. A few days before her life had been all sunshine; her love, her pleasant tastes, her bright hopes—everything had combined to make her happy; now, a change seemed impending—unreality was around her; what she had thought to be a firm standing-point turned out only shifting quicksands; the love was departing, and the revelation of how it had come robbed its past of all charm; even her pleasant tastes seemed deceptive, for if her mother's views of life were correct, farewell to the *Faërie Queene*, farewell to poetic imagery: it was the mirage that betrays the unwary soul, and in spite of the poet's vision the sad knowledge which that day's glimpse of another life had brought showed too clearly that beauty and joy were only too often divorced.

Adèle appeared in the drawing-room in the course of half an hour dressed in pale silk, a rose-colored bonnet crowning her fair hair and pink-tinted gloves on her small hands, but nothing for the moment could remove the gloomy veil through which she viewed life and its surroundings.

Her mother was obliged to reprove her a little sharply. "My dear Adèle," she said as they left one of the houses to which they had been bound, "you must really make an effort to be more agreeable and sprightly; melancholy does not suit you. Dark girls, with chiselled features and creamy complexions, may be allowed to move through society like beautiful mutes, but with golden hair and bright blue eyes like yours vivacity, let me tell you, is the only rôle. Sulking makes you look absolutely plain."

No girl likes to look "absolutely plain," and although Adéle loudly disclaimed any sort of regard for what would or would not suit her style, she made an effort, and that evening Arthur, who came back, pale and exhausted, from the parting scene at the station, and who looked to Adèle for sympathy, was rather hurt with what he was pleased to term her frivolity. Young men are so selfish!

Mrs. Churchill saw the little by-play—Adèle's forced gayety, Arthur's sentimental-looking eyes following her inquiringly, and somewhat reproachfully, round the room. She congratulated herself on the success of her lesson.

CHAPTER XIV.

LAURA.

Thou art a dew-drop which the morn brings forth,
Not framed to undergo unkindly shocks,
Or to be trailed along the soiling earth—
A gem that glitters while it lives.

MARGARET was at home. In a little village on the coast of Yorkshire, far from any town, not fashionable even in the season, and somewhat dull at all times, was the cottage to be found which she fondly looked upon as home. The village consisted of one street running up into the land, where butcher and baker and grocer, who all of them sold a medley of articles, displayed their small wares; a collection of fisher-huts on the coast, and some few respectable little houses, whitewashed and green-shuttered, which were only tenanted in the summer months. It was not even a particularly pretty place. Of course there was the sea, the grand wide ocean, stretching its interminable breadths away to the horizon, and it crept up upon yellow sands that were a perfect delight to the eye and to the feet, they were so bright and clean and smooth. But for this the scenery was somewhat monotonous; no mountains or hilly grounds were to be seen far or near, save, indeed, the few sand-cliffs that rose up gradually from the borders of the sea to a vast table-land of moor and meadow, stretching into the distance with scarcely a tree to break the line. A few huge boulders carved by time and water into fantastic shapes, a little scanty herbage on the sand-hills, some stunted shrubs and trailing yellow flowers,—these were all that broke the monotony of sea and moor; in fact, it was a desolate place, but its desolation in no way resembled that of a city like London, the dreary monotony of a human desert. It was Nature's desolation, grand and weird, and, to the soul that could understand, full of ever-varied mystery and charm.

The sunrise over the moor when, itself purple with the rich tints of autumn coloring, it blushed into mistlike dreamy splendor; the mellower sunset over the ocean, and after the sunset the pale streaks of horizon-light and the broad ribbons of silvery moonbeams; the black mystery of a winter night, space above, space around, space infinite on every side; the clash and flash of foam-crowned waves shining through the darkness,—these were some of the charms this little seaside village possessed, these were what Margaret had missed in her miserable visit to great, lonely London. She slept at a hotel in York on the first night after leaving town. On the next day, partly by rail, partly by carriage, she reached her own home.

They did not expect her. She wondered plaintively as she drove in the little chaise, hired at the nearest station, along the low road that skirted the sea, whether her little Laura would be pleased to see her again—would have found the time long without her. Laura was not so dear to her mother as she might have been, but she was her only tie to life, the one creature who was dependent on her, to whom she was, in a certain sense, a necessity. In the course of that long drive Margaret began to reproach herself for having loved her child so little. Her heart yearned over the tiny creature whose fate was bound up with her own, fatherless, or worse than fatherless, in the tender dawning of life—mysteries around her that her poor little soul might perhaps already be trying to fathom, and trying in vain; for, as Margaret recalled with a sudden pang, it was not an ordinary child's soul that had looked at her once or twice out of Laura's dark, pensive eye. It was a soul upon which the shadow seemed to have fallen—the shadow that so early falls upon some, chilling their life in its first glad spring. Margaret had shrunk from looking into this mystery; she had answered the inquiring earnestness with which her little daughter had seemed to look into her sadness by sweetmeats, toys and diversions, and the child had gone back upon herself, dreaming her dreams alone.

Perhaps it is little known in the wise, busy world of grown-up people how keen and sensitive are the sympathies and feelings of a child, how easily the little soul can be driven in upon itself, and in some cases, rare it may be, how great the suffering that follows.

Margaret had a vague consciousness of all this, but there was something so bitter in her sadness that it shrank even from the light touch of her child, and then the dark, pensive eyes that sometimes looked so melancholy under their deep fringe veiled a memory—a memory that cut and wounded, and that in some moods she felt herself absolutely powerless to bear. So had another pair of eyes, dark too, and wistful and infinitely sad, looked out at her on a stormy night long ago—the night when her trouble had begun. Long ago—it looked long ago, yet as mortals reckon time perhaps it could only have been said to be short—one, two, three, four long years. The remembrance of that strange sadness in her little daughter's face had brought Margaret to this again, as what did not? She reckoned the time and marvelled at its flight.

As she pondered the little chaise progressed, with abundant clacking of the whip and plunges forward and vigorous shouts from the boy-driver, and scarcely a corresponding rate of speed, for Middlethorpe was an out-of-the-way village, and no very stately vehicle of the hired species would have been permitted, under some very large gratuity, to explore its wilds. Evening was beginning to fall before the outskirts of the village had been sighted, and between the jolting of the carriage, the energy of the driver and the haunting thoughts that tormented her, Margaret began to feel that any change would be a relief.

Her little cottage was rather out of the village. It lay at some little distance, near the edge of one of the sandhills. When they entered the village she stopped her driver and told him to take on her carpet-bag; she would do the remainder of the way on foot. The boy listened to her directions, nodded his head good-humoredly, and leaving her upon the sands, started off in the direction indicated—to a little white point at some distance reached by a road winding up through the village. Margaret proceeded leisurely along the coast toward a narrow path that led up the cliff to her cottage by a nearer way.

She gazed over the wide sea, for the gray which had been its abiding characteristic through the not very brilliant May day was blushing gradually into golden brightness under the magic touch of sunset, and Margaret paused in the full enjoyment of its rich coloring. Then, with the light still in her eyes, she looked landward on to the sandhills.

There was a little figure crouching under one of them, evidently that of a child, and a child in sorrow, for the face was hidden by a pair of tiny hands and the little frame was shaken with sobs. It looked like a blot in the dazzle the sunset radiance had cast over Margaret's sight. But the child was at her feet; her heart was moved for its little trouble. She stooped to ask about the sorrow, and with a sudden shock recognized in the weeping little one her own Laura. The child's dress was in disorder; the pretty, fair hair was uncovered by hat or bonnet and flying wildly over her face and neck; her cheeks were stained with tears which seemed to have been flowing abundantly; her little hands were red and sore.

She looked up, and a faint smile came into her weary little face as she recognized her mother. "I thought you were never coming back, mamma," she said in a voice so sad and low that it pierced her mother's heart. "I am glad you're come, because now perhaps I sha'n't always be naughty."

"Naughty! my little Laura naughty? Who says so?" The tears were in Margaret's eyes, and a passion of penitence and love was welling up in her heart. It was like the opening of a sealed-up fountain. All the sweet motherliness that untoward circumstances seemed to have stifled in Margaret's heart awoke suddenly at the sight of her daughter's sorrow. She kissed the little flushed face, smoothed back the disordered hair, and lulled the child to rest in her arms with the pretty baby-language that mothers know. And at first the little Laura looked surprised, then her tears ceased, she clasped her arms round her mother's neck, and into the dark, wide-open, pensive eyes there came a look of rest.

So they remained for a few moments—the mother and the child, with the soft, cool yellow sand around them and the westering seas before them; Margaret thinking only of these little clinging arms, of this sweet child-love—of the blessing that was still left her; the little one rejoicing, with the unreasonable delight of childhood, in the soft pressure of her mother's arms. She had always been given a morning and evening kiss, but this warm, protecting tenderness was, she could not tell why, something new to her.

She looked up languidly at last from her mother's breast where her head had been resting. "Jane says I've been very naughty, mamma," she murmured; "she whipped me for telling a story, but I know I didn't take the sugar."

Laura's tears began to break out afresh at the remembrance, but her little simple story had aroused her mother, and indignation began to mingle with sorrow in her heart. She started up: "*Who* whipped you, Laura? Jane? How could she have dared to do such a thing? There! there! my sweet," for her vehemence had alarmed the child, "dry your eyes. Mamma will never leave her little darling again; no one else shall have anything to do with Laura."

Laura's tears gave place to a smile of contentment. "Yes, mamma dear, it will be nice. I cried the day you went to London, a long time ago, and Jane said it was naughty, and she locked the door and left me by myself—oh, *such* a long time! And she said you had gone away because I was tiresome, and you didn't love me one little bit; and I thought"—Laura wound her arms tightly round her mother's neck—"I thought perhaps you'd never come back, and I was always to stay with Jane. And oh, mamma, I was looking at the sea to-night—you know gardener's little boy fell in, and when he came out I saw him; he was white and quite cold, and they put him in the churchyard—and I thought it would be better to fall in like poor little Jimmy than to live with Jane."

"Poor little darling!" Margaret's tears were flowing fast. She rose from her seat, but she would not loosen the pressure of those tiny arms.

Laura put her hand up to her mother's face: "Mamma, *you're* crying now. Is it about Jane? Poor mamma! never mind."

"Mamma is crying because they told her little daughter such dreadful things," said Margaret as quietly as she could. "Listen, my child: you must *never* believe them. I love my Laura more than I can say. You are *all* that is left me, dear. It was for you I went to London, that you might grow up wise and good, and learn like other little girls; and I was going to such a wretched, miserable place or I would have taken my child with me; but I will never leave her behind again, wherever I may go."

Perfectly satisfied and with a little sigh of full content.

Laura put down her head again, and so they went back to the house, the child in her mother's arms.

Jane Rodgers met them on the threshold of the front door. She had looked forward to something like this when the boy had arrived with the carpet-bag, notifying that the mistress was to follow, and she blamed herself severely for her shortsightedness, which had arisen in this way.

She had been shrewd enough to see that although Mrs. Grey never neglected her daughter, yet there was none of that warm devotion which mothers so often cherish for an only child; in fact, that the very presence of her little one was sometimes a burden to her. The circumstances of her lodger being peculiar and utterly unknown, so far as she could learn, to any of her neighbors, Jane had come to certain conclusions not very creditable to her ordinary good sense or knowledge of human nature. When, therefore, for three weeks Mrs. Grey had remained absent from her daughter, although her rent was fully paid up, and amply sufficient had been left for the little Laura's maintenance, Jane Rodgers, acting on her previous supposition, had come to this conclusion: "The mother had left her child altogether. It would fall to her" (Jane Rodgers's) "lot to take care of her and bring her up."

Now, Jane was by no means a cruel woman. Had any one told her that even under such untoward circumstances she could have been absolutely unkind to any child of seven years old, she would have indignantly repelled the accusation. But Jane was a scrupulously conscientious woman (that is, she thought herself so); she was unmarried, and hard by nature. She had been a fine-looking girl in her youth—had been disappointed in love, and as a domestic servant had perhaps had her full share of the temptations incident to her position. She had preserved her respectability, saved her money, and some years before the time when my story opens had returned to her native village, the owner of a small furnished house. Her living she was given in return for the service she rendered, and the rent of the house was ample to keep her in clothes and pocket-money, with a small sum accumulatinng year by year at the savings bank.

Jane was a highly respectable person, and in this consisted her pride. How people could ever be brought into the world the wrong way, or how the hundred and one wicked actions so common in all societies, high and low, could ever come to be committed, she professed herself wholly unable to understand. *She* had no sympathy for the tempted: her theory was, that if they suffered in consequence of error, so much the better—it served them right.

When, therefore, the little Laura was left on her hands—for Mrs. Grey had scarcely been gone a week before Jane had made up her mind that she would never return—a strict and stern course of education was begun. That evil was very specially rooted in the heart of her self-imposed charge was Jane's theory—that no indulgence should ever be permitted her was the fit corrective. Laura very naturally resented this treatment. She had been allowed to wander about as she liked; she had never in her life been struck, and seldom punished. When she found herself watched, corrected and snapped-up—her little sayings, that had been admired and thought clever, snubbed and reproved—Laura became first very angry, and then very miserable. The anger was punished by whipping and bed—such perfectly new experiences to the lonely child that her little heart throbbed with the agony of humiliation; the misery was treated as sulkiness, and at last poor little Laura began to think it was all true. As she plaintively said to her mother, she was always naughty.

Jane had done it in good faith. She thought she was acting well, taking a mother's part with the child—that when the evil in her heart had been rooted out by strict discipline, she might in spite of her pretty face and form, and the bad precedent of a mother whose antecedents were not precisely known, turn out a good woman and a useful member of society.

In the mean time she took the child into her own part of the house, cleaned out Mrs. Grey's apartments, and was ready to offer them in the summer time on moderate terms to that portion of the bathing public who might find Middlethorpe a desirable watering-place.

These being her plans and ideas, the arrival of the boy and carpet-bag on this May evening was somewhat disconcerting to Jane Rodgers. The child was out sulking. She was ready with a rod in pickle, as she would have said, to chastise her for running away without hat or bonnet after she had been ordered to her room; but Mrs. Grey, should she find her on the sands, might probably fail to take Jane's view of matters.

There would be time for revelations too, and Jane could scarcely explain to her lodger all the reasons that had moved her to the mode of treatment she had employed with her daughter in her absence. However, matters being so, it was best to put a bold face on them. Jane prided herself on her independence. Mrs. Grey was certainly a yearly lodger—a rare kind of article at the seaside, and especially at Middlethorpe; still, if she should choose to take offence she might go.

None of these latter reflections appeared in her face as she went forward to meet Mrs. Grey, white-capped and aproned, the very picture of quiet respectability.

"Glad to see you back, ma'am," she said respectfully, "and sorry you should find Miss Laura in such a plight. She run out when my back was turned. I was in such a fidget about putting on my bonnet to look after her, when—"

"That will do, Jane," said Margaret quietly. "Bring up our tea and pay the boy. When I have put Miss Laura to bed I will speak to you in the parlor."

"As you please, ma'am."

Jane turned away with a slight toss of the head, quite determined to let her lodger go. She was not a servant, she said to herself, to be treated in such a way. But the sight of her comfortable kitchen and the hour of delay brought calmer and more prudent thoughts to Jane's mind. Instinctively she recalled the fate of Mrs. Brown and Miss Simpson, two ladies of her calling, who, after trying in vain to make a living out of their houses, had been obliged finally to sell their furniture and take to service again; Mrs. Short, who let, indeed, in the summer, but generally to large families, and had her things knocked about in such a way that no charge for breakages could cover the necessary outlay which followed their departure; Mrs. Dodd, who had taken in unaware a lady re-covering from the small-pox, and whose servant had taken the disease, thus necessitating a general turn-out and whitewashing before her rooms could be considered habitable.

Whatever the antecedents or private history of *her* lodger might be, Jane Rodgers could not but recognize that she lived a quiet life and gave wonderfully little trouble. Then, though she paid her rent monthly, she was in reality a yearly lodger; she had already taken Jane's house for more than a year, her rent having been all the time regularly paid. It would manifestly be a pity to give her up by any over-hastiness.

Jane resolved upon a compromise. She took up the tea, arranged the bedrooms scrupulously, and then sat down in her kitchen to await Mrs. Grey's summons.

Some time passed before it came, for Margaret would not leave her child that evening until she had seen her in the quiet, peaceful sleep that ought to come so readily at her age; and she noted with ever-increasing indignation that her little daughter was feverish and restless, that she started painfully now and then, and clung nervously to her hand.

Nothing calmed her like her mother's voice; so, after trying various other methods, Margaret sang to her in a low, sweet undertone some of the children's hymns she had taught her at different times.

It was long, long since Margaret had lifted her voice in song of any kind, and tears once or twice almost choked her utterance as the "Sweet Story of Old" and "Gentle Jesus" came falteringly from her pale lips.

She had sung them at her child's cradle with all the proud joy of a young mother happy and beloved. Now all was changed—she and her child were alone in the wide world. But the sweet old words were suggestive. As she sang the spirit of the lonely woman grew calmer and her voice faltered less.

Then—in that fair long ago—she had loved the words for their music, their sweet, pleasant harmony; now she loved them for themselves, for the healing rest they seemed to bring to her. Like the cool touch of a loving mother on the fevered brow of a sick little one were the words of these child-utterances to Margaret that evening. *She* grew calmer and her daughter slept.

CHAPTER XV.

A DREAM OF THE SEA.

We dream what is
About to happen to us.

THE language in which Margaret condemned Jane Rodgers's conduct to her daughter was not very bitter, but it was effective. She would listen to no excuses, no recapitulation of the grievous faults of children in general, and of Miss Laura (Jane was very respectful when addressing her mother) in particular—of the urgent necessity for some kind of discipline. All this she set aside with a quiet dignity that severely impressed Jane.

"No one but myself," she said, "shall have power to correct my child. If you cannot make up your mind to promise never to attempt anything of the kind for the future, I will leave your house to-morrow, and *you* know very well that under the circumstances I might refuse even a month's notice."

"I only acted for the best," replied Jane. "Miss Laura was that unmanageable! For the future I won't try to look after her."

"That's all I require, Jane. I need not tell you that my confidence in you is severely shaken: I could never trust you with such an important charge again. I cannot even tell you whether I shall be able to make up my mind to remain in your house. But I shall narrowly watch your behavior, and may hope to be convinced that ignorance rather than downright badness of heart was the cause of your cruelty to my little daughter."

Jane's mouth was open to reply, but Margaret stopped her: "You have said quite enough; you may leave me now. Only remember this: I must never be forced to complain of you in this way again."

She turned to her writing-table as she spoke, and Jane with heightened color walked to the door.

She did not attempt to answer, for Margaret's severity of manner awed her; but if Mrs. Grey had looked her way she might have seen an ominous frown on her brow and a gleam of anger in her cold gray eye.

Jane prided herself on her spirit. It was next to respectability in her estimate of necessary virtues, but she seldom displayed it imprudently. When the door was between her and her mistress she clenched her fist and shook it at the senseless boards. "Her and her beggar's brat!" she muttered; "but mayhap I'll teach them yet." And with that she retired to the kitchen, leaving Margaret, very spent and sad, undisputed mistress of the field.

Perhaps it was a dear-bought victory. It might have been better for herself and Laura if she had acted upon her first determination, and left Jane Rodgers's house on the next day. But we cannot know all our kind, its varieties are so infinite, and Margaret believed in Jane still to a great extent; then the difficulties of a change of residence were very great.

Moving was an expensive business, one she could not well afford, and so far as that village was concerned (she had a certain repugnance to going elsewhere) she did not know of another place that would suit them; so the matter was decided. Margaret went to bed fully determined to remain where she was. Her bedroom window commanded the sea. She lifted the blind that night, as her habit was, and looked away wistfully over the waters. How she longed sometimes for the freedom of the white sea-gull, that skims those restless waves and passes on, on, through the light and through the darkness till it reaches the haven where it would be!

There was a haven for which *she* longed so passionately that at times the longing was a bitter pain: her haven was not in the heavenly country. In those days Margaret seldom thought of that, for even the passing away from things visible might not possibly put an end to her pain. It was a haven in which she had once rejoiced, but from which she had passed out into the black darkness of a dreary, shoreless ocean. The love and confidence of *one* poor human heart—that was the whole of her desire; and day by day, night by night, the wished-for haven seemed drifted farther away, till even hope died down, and she ceased to think she could ever reach it.

She had a dream that night: with the strange perversity of nightly visions it seemed to mingle in one and confuse inextricably the experiences and thoughts of those last few days. She saw the sea as she had seen it that evening, streaked with night-born radiance, and on it a small boat—in the boat the dark form of the man she dreaded; in her dream she loved him, and was stretching out her arms for a place by his side in the tiny skiff. Then a gradual change: the gleaming silver passed into ruddy gold, which tinged ocean and sands and rock, and she knew that it was the hour of sunset. She was sitting on the yellow sands gazing out to sea, and suddenly as she looked into the flood of color a white speck rose from its midst—a sail, which grew larger and whiter till she saw that it was no sail, but the vast wings of a gigantic bird that was leisurely skimming the water till it rested at last at her feet. And its eyes were dark and lustrous, full of love and confidence. Ah, how well she knew them! Another change: she thought that she looked up again, and the bird was gone, but in its place Laura's father stood before her stretching out his arms to her longingly. And then she woke with a start and a shiver, to see the gray dawning begin to struggle with the darkness, and to feel at her heart a cold, cold chill.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS AT MIDDLETHORPE.

And in pleading for life's fair fulfilment, I plead
For all that you miss and all that you need.

After this the days passed on in the little village by the sea somewhat slowly and lingeringly. Spring blushed into summer, the bright early freshness of grass and foliage deepened into summer's maturity, the gray ocean wore a mild blue appearance as it rolled in on the yellow sands, and began to reveal its depths to those who skimmed it in the boats—some bound on pleasure and some on business—that left the shore from time to time. Over the dim, vast distance Summer cast her misty veil, shutting in earth and sea with her soft halos and vapors, and to the yellow sands came women and children, vanguard of the great army that later in the season would swoop down upon this village and others of the same type.

Margaret was often there with a book in her hand or a piece of work, and her child by her side; but generally she was unoccupied, her hands listless, her eyes growing daily deeper and more weary. For the strain on heart and spirit was rapidly becoming more than her physical strength could bear. She was fading visibly, but there was no loving eye near to note how her step grew more languid and her white fingers thinner, and her beautiful face more worn and sad till its very beauty seemed to be passing away. One noted the change, however, and took full advantage of it.

Jane Rodgers was becoming a kind of household tyrant; not that she ever again attempted the management of Laura —*that* would have aroused what little spirit Margaret still possessed; her tyranny was exhibited in other ways. She would do precisely what she chose, leaving everything else undone—would spend days visiting her friends under the plea of change being an absolute necessity, and leave Mrs. Grey, who could not afford extra help, to manage matters for herself in the house; she would even reply insolently at times to some simple request made by her lodger, for she saw her power. A kind of indifference to life and its comforts was creeping gradually over Margaret, a numbing sense of weakness, a languid desire for rest—only rest. In such a frame she could scarcely have roused herself to undertake the exertion of moving. She felt that between herself and her landlady matters were not so pleasant as they had formerly been, but Laura was happy, and for herself she cared very little. The *one* great sorrow, like an open wound whose throbbing engrosses every sense, made her comparatively indifferent to the little pin-pricks of her daily life.

She had one joy in these dark days. It was in the clinging affection of her daughter. Since the day of her return Laura and her mother had been far more to one another than ever before. The child opened her heart to her mother, told of all her little dreams and fancies, and Margaret began to talk to the little one even about the long sealed-up subject; not indeed her trouble and its origin—that would have been impossible as yet—but about the vague hope toward which in her darkness her thoughts ever turned. She spoke to Laura about her father, drew from her the story of her recollections, and tried to awaken and nourish in her young heart a reverent love for the parent she might perhaps never see.

For sometimes when Margaret felt her strength failing, a sudden fear for Laura's future would take possession of her. If—if—God should take her too from the little one! But that was a possibility at which she dared not glance. To live as she was living, lonely, unloved, was bad enough, but through all its darkness was a gleam of something bright, the hope of a vague, dim to-come, that might possibly bring back her joy. To die was to shut even this out, and for ever; to pass away unforgiven, misunderstood, a stain on her fair fame.

Would not that be past endurance?

Margaret could not face the idea of death, but with the bitter consciousness that it might come she did her duty to her child, and, though painful at first, it became sweet after a time. She trained her to think of the father who seemed to have cast her off—to love his memory, to look forward to his return: then, in any case, if indeed he too were in the land of the living, Laura would have a refuge. She would not pass from her mother's care and tenderness to the protection of one of whom she knew nothing; her father would *be* her father, the longed, the looked-for, and perhaps in after days (it was seldom Margaret had strength to carry her thoughts so far), when she would have long been cold, he might hear from the lips of his daughter the tale of her ever-faithful love.

It was one of those warm, languid June days. The very sea seemed lazy as ripple after ripple crept in sighing to the shore. There was a blue, hazy vapor on even the near horizon, and scarcely a breath of air was stirring.

Margaret and Laura had found an approach to shelter from the fierce midday sun far up on one of the sand-cliffs, under a stunted shrub. They were sitting there together the little Laura rather stiller than usual.

She had been running about on the sands with some small friends picked up among the visitors, and the heat had tired her. She sat at her mother's feet, with her head buried in her lap to hide it from the sun.

"Mamma," she cried from her safe retreat, "I had *such* fun just now."

Margaret's thoughts were far away. She recalled them to interest herself in her child's amusements: "Had you, darling? Who were you playing with?—those little children in blue frocks?"

"One of them's bigger than me, mamma," said Laura reprovingly. "You saw me *then*, but you didn't see the tall gentleman with a big dog, for we were far away along the sands. He made his dog go in the water for his stick, oh, ever so many times! and then— Mamma, are you listening?"

"Yes, dear; what then?"

"He took me up on his shoulder and carried me a long way."

Margaret smiled languidly: "He must have taken a fancy to my little girl."

"But wasn't it funny?" said Laura meditatively; then starting up suddenly in her eagerness: "Mamma, do you know what I thought when he was so kind?"

"No, darling, how can I?"

"I thought"—Laura's eyes were sparkling with excitement—"that perhaps it was papa come back."

Her eager voice roused Margaret from her languor. She rose from her improvised couch among the branches, and resting one hand on the child's shoulder said as quietly as she could, "What brought such an idea into your little head?"

"Why, mamma, don't you see? I always think papa will come like that; he'll want to surprise us and see if we remember him. This gentleman asked me about my papa, and if he lived here. And when I said no, but he was coming back, he looked at me so funnily; then, before he let me go, he kissed me—a big kiss, mamma, like my papa used to give me long ago, when he lived here."

Margaret's heart had been swelling as the little voice flowed on. She could never have told why the childish fancy took such a hold upon her mind, but so it was; with Laura, she could not help feeling that the gentleman took more than a common interest in her. Was it true, then? Had he come back to them? Was her trouble to end? for she did not fear her Maurice; one short half hour, face to face, would be sufficient for them both—sufficient to break the icy barrier that lay between them, and to make them one again.

"Laura," she said, still with that forced quiet in her voice, "try and tell me what the gentleman was like."

This was a difficult task for the little one. She looked up to the sky for inspiration. "He was tall, mamma," she said at last, "and I think—I think there was something funny about his eyes; but he looked kind, and I haven't seen anybody like him before. Of course I don't remember what papa was like. He had a great big dog—*so* big" (she extended both her arms by way of illustration)—"with a curly black coat and brown eyes, and a tail that wagged so funnily."

The dog was evidently easier to describe than the gentleman.. Perhaps Laura was not singular in finding it rather difficult to string together his merits and demerits, even physically considered. He had been a puzzle to more than one in his transit through the world.

Margaret smiled at her child's enthusiasm. She was not much clearer about the identity of the stranger than she had been before, but a longing came over her to unravel the little mystery. She was ready to ridicule her own folly for seeing any mystery in the matter. Probably the gentleman was only some stray visitor at Middlethorpe's small hotel who had been pleased with Laura's fair, childish beauty; and yet the feeling was there. She must find him out and satisfy herself that he *was* a stranger.

"Run home, darling," she said to her little girl, "and tell Jane to give you your dinner; afterward sit quietly in the parlor with your new story-book; before tea-time I shall be at home."

Laura hesitated: "You won't go to London, mamma?"

"Certainly not, my little daughter; now run away like a good child."

There was no disputing this. Laura returned to the little cottage, and Margaret remained alone on the cliff. She was anxious to find out her daughter's friend, and thus put out of her mind at once the haunting thoughts that Laura's simple fancy had implanted there.

It could not be a difficult task; there were few gentlemen with big dogs at Middlethorpe, for the lords of creation had not begun to indulge in the luxury of seaside idleness. They had sent some of their womenkind before; themselves were still busy on the world's highways. The gentleman who had taken so kindly an interest in her little daughter would certainly be identified with ease.

With a view to his discovery Margaret looked below. The sands, so busy a few minutes before, were dull and silent, for the flocks of little ones, with their nurses and mammas, had gone in for the early dinner, a necessary part of seaside life, and Middlethorpe might have been perfectly empty.

It was the stillness of a summer noontide, strangely oppressive to a restless heart. This way and that Margaret looked, up and down the sands, across the sea; no gentleman or big dog was in sight, and with a little sigh she turned to look for the book that had been lying by her side, to while away in its company the hour of forced inaction.

She turned, and became suddenly conscious of the startling fact that she was not alone—that while she had been looking down at the sands and across over the sea she had been joined by an unlooked-for companion, and he must have been there some minutes, for he had found time to settle himself satisfactorily. He looked perfectly at his ease, very near her in a reclining posture, his elbows on the sands and his head in his hand; he was not looking at her. He seemed to be watching the feathery clouds that were passing over the blue depths above or counting the insects that flitted past unceasingly; but she, when she caught sight of him, was not so calm. Her face blanched suddenly; she covered it with her hands, and a low cry—it might be of anger, it might be of dismay—came from her quivering lips.

At the sound he turned his gaze in her direction, showing as he did so a broad square brow, deep-set eyes and a dark, strongly-lined face, its plainness only relieved by the mouth, which was full yet delicately formed, the lips soft and ripe as those of any woman. It was partially veiled by a dark moustache, contrasting rather strangely with his head, which was covered by a crop of short gray hair. He did not look an Englishman; indeed, there was something strange in his appearance which would have rendered the classification of his type a difficult matter to the most skilful physiognomist. Only one point seemed to be tolerably evident: he belonged to the ardent South rather than the cold North, for even at the moment of her discovery, when he was striving, with all the strength of a strong nature, to show nothing but cool indifference, his breath was coming quick and hot, his eyes were sparkling, his fine mouth was quivering with excitement, and in his voice there was an unmistakable quiver as he spoke after a few moments' silence, spent by her in averting her face from his gaze, by him in watching curiously her every movement: "Marguerite!"

A deep musical voice and a slightly foreign accent. It seemed to excite her. She trembled from head to foot, and tried to rise from her seat. He put out his hand to detain her. "Not yet," he said sternly. "I must know first what all this means."

She looked up wonderingly.

"Ah! you know well," he continued more rapidly, and his voice taking a firmer timbre. "Why have you hid yourself? Why have you fled to the outskirts of creation to avoid me? Why are you shocked, terrified, when in my tenderest voice I speak the dear name you used to love to hear from my lips? Have I grown so very monstrous, or do you wish to kill yourself with this savage loneliness that your English nation so dearly loves? Speak! speak!—or rather speak not at all. Let me sit here for ever and feast my eyes on the loveliness a woman's whim has hid from me so long. Marguerite! Marguerite! my white pearl, it will be difficult for you to hide from me again."

She had risen to her feet, the angry color coming and going on her fair face, but, crouching before her, he held her by the dress and refused to let her stir.

"Marguerite," he cried, bitter pain in his voice, "I know I speak folly; you are not one of *my* warm race; you are a cold daughter of proud England. But see, love, I will be patient. Sit down again. I am not near you now; only," and his brow contracted into a frown so fierce that it might mean a menace, "I am here now, and I must and will be heard."

Margaret reseated herself, but her face grew pale with suppressed anger. "If it is the manner of your race to insult the unprotected," she said bitterly, "I must congratulate myself on the fact that I do *not* belong to it."

His face kindled. "Spoken like yourself, *ma reine*," he said softly. "I kiss your hands. I am, what I have ever been, your devoted servitor."

"If so, Mr. L'Estrange," she said, slowly and distinctly, but as if speaking with some difficulty, "I must beg you to leave me at once."

He smiled—a smile that irradiated his face like sunshine: "I was rash, *ma belle;* sometimes obedience is an impossibility. But see! what are you afraid of? Look at me, devoted to you body and soul, your friend, ready to do you the smallest service; only asking this in return, that I may be permitted to stay where I can see you, can offer you kindly greeting from time to time—a common acquaintance, nothing more."

She would not look at him. Her eyes were fixed on a distant speck on the horizon—the sail of a ship or the long line of smoke from a passing steamer.

"You have forced yourself upon me," she said in a low, constrained voice; "you know your presence is distasteful, and you know why. But for you these years of what you are pleased to call savage loneliness would never have been."

He did not seem to hear her; he was carrying on a kind of soliloquy. "She is changed," he said, gazing at her still, "yes, and fading. The rich bloom in her cheek, the laughing sparkle in her eye, the fair roundness of form, it is passing—passing; but, *hélas! mon Dieu!* is she not fairer than ever in her pure, sad whiteness? Ah, Marguerite, my pearl! how could he ever have doubted you?"

Almost fiercely she answered, the fire of indignation giving back to her eyes the sparkle of the olden days: "And *you* can ask that—you from whom all the misery came? *He* knew what had passed between you and me before our marriage. *He* trusted me, my life was blest; *you* came between us and destroyed my happiness."

"Gently, gently, my fair Marguerite," he said, pleadingly; "you English are a justice-loving people. Is it not your law that allows what they call extenuating circumstances? That meeting between you and me need never have taken place. If you remember, I warned you. I received no answer. Silence gives consent. Was I less or more than human not to avail myself of it?"

It was true—too true. Margaret hid her face in her hands, and when she next spoke her voice was low and pleading: "Mr. L'Estrange, you are cruel. Yes—God forgive me!—I was to blame, and He has punished me sorely; but have pity on me—leave me here."

A smile played over his lips, but she could not see it; he drew nearer to her and touched the folds of her dress with a hand that was burning.

"It is time it should end," he said, trying to gaze into her hidden face. "It was all a mistake, a grand mistake. I should never have allowed it, only I wanted faith. I dared not drag *you* into any uncertain future. Ah, my white pearl! who understands you so well as I? Do you remember—shall I, can I, ever forget?—those few blessed days? We were happy, Margaret—happy as children to whom the present is all; the future was not even named between us, for when a cloud, born of the North, your childhood's home, passed over your gentle mind, I was able to dispel it. Those moonlight excursions on the silver water of fair Venice—your friends were with us, yet we were alone, for the kindly darkness made us almost forget their presence; the serenades—ah! I see your memory is no worse than mine; the soft harmonies dying away in the far distance as we sat together in our gondola, our hands clasped, our souls rapt to ecstasy; the lessons in astronomy on those clear spring evenings when you and *notre chère fillette* scanned in turns the deep, star-spangled sky; that day spent in exploring, Margaret—your pretty coquetry had vexed me, but the soft golden radiance of pictured glass, the sculptured marbles in that beautiful church, the Scalzi, soothed my soul and I was at rest, your softly gleaming eyes telling of your sympathy in my joy; the pictures, Margaret—our delight when we were able to trace the hand of the greatest masters, and pronounce, without guide or cicerone, on the authorship of one of our favorites,—yes, these were pleasures. I sometimes think that they were pleasures too pure, too high, for any but the gods, and in their jealousy they dashed the cup of bliss from our lips. But," his voice deepened; he drew so near to her that his hot, passionate breath fanned her cheek, "they have given us one more chance. Shall we be wise and seize it? Ah, *ma belle!* I see it passing. Happiness! think what that is; it is not often offered to the dull sons and daughters of humanity, and, Margaret, we have once rejected it."

He spoke, and gradually the bitterness seemed to pass from Margaret's face. There came into her eyes a lustrous shining to replace the fierce light with which she had greeted his first words; she even leant over toward him and allowed him to touch her pale face with his strong, nervous hand. For all was on his side for the moment. The strange, wellnigh overpowering fascination he possessed—memory, imagination, present loneliness and a certain bitter rising of indignation which the readiness of her husband's mistrust and desertion could not but cause her at times.

He saw his advantage. "It is not all forgotten, then, *ma bien-aimée?*" he whispered tenderly. "That past beautiful time is still there—there in the shrine of your pure heart. Tell me once for all, shall it return? *He* has forsaken you, insulted you by his mistrust; you owe him no duty; and what is it that I ask of you? The restoration of your friendship—nothing more."

The voice was soft, thrilling, full of an unspeakable pathos, and at first as she heard her brain felt dizzy and a delicious languor seemed to steal over her senses. It would be so sweet to yield, to renew in her dull prime some of the fair joys of youth. Could she not accept his friendship, for that, after all, is an every-day matter? He knew her too well to presume.

And while she pondered, with a weakness utterly new to this fair, proud woman, he stood before her, looking down upon her fixedly. Her eyes fell before his. What met them? Nothing more novel than the Indian scarf she usually wore. It had dropped from her shoulders and was hanging on her arm.

A trifle at such a time, but do not life and its issues hang sometimes on a thread? The scarf recalled Margaret to herself, for it brought another past to her mind. It had been her husband's gift to her—presented on the occasion of the little Laura's birth—and as she glanced on it there came to her mind a host of gentle memories. *His* words, *his* looks, his pride in her, the glad confidence of his strong, young manhood,—she felt them once more around her like the pale ghosts of a happy time gone by for ever; but they had been real once, warm, living flesh and blood; and with their holy power they warded off the tempter's influence.

Her first feeling was of burning shame and penitence. Was she then so absolutely weak? Should it be possible for misery and loneliness even to degrade her, to take from her that in which, through all her misery, she had rejoiced—the proud consciousness of unshaken rectitude? For even to listen to this man's blandishments was infinite degradation, the dragging down of her white soul to the base level of his.

Thoughts like these rushed tumultuously into her mind as she looked down still upon her husband's gift; and suddenly she drew herself back shivering, as one might do who had been standing unconsciously close to the edge of a great abyss.

He did not understand her gesture. The soft look was still in his eyes, and he made a movement to take her in his arms. But the new strength of her soul, born of the agonizing penitence for that *one* weak thought, seemed to have given to her the power she needed. She thrust out both her hands before her, pushing him back so rudely that he stumbled some steps down the sand-cliff; but he soon recovered his footing. With a look in which pleading and indignation were mingled he tried to approach her; she kept him off still.

"Leave me! leave me!" she cried "What have I said, what have I done, that you should look at me like this?" And then she covered her face with both hands. "My God!

my God!" she moaned, piteously; "has even good forsaken me?"

Middlethorpe dinner-hour was over. The sun had passed its meridian height, the shadows of shrub and cliff were beginning to lengthen, and with the drawing on of evening came a moaning, sighing wind that ruffled the pale waters at their feet. It seemed an echo of Margaret's wail.

Her persecutor had turned from her; apparently he could control himself no longer. Taking a stone, he threw it far out into the sea: it was the angry gesture of a child whose will has been crossed. He walked a few steps along the path that skirted the cliff, but it seemed as if he could not go finally. He went back to where he had left her sitting mute and helpless.

"I thought you had gone," she said, flashing up at him a glance that was not pleasant to meet.

He looked down upon her with apparent calmness, though all his pulses were quivering with rage and disappointment: "I have not much more to say, *ma belle*, for I fear you are in earnest this time. What a fool I was to imagine for one moment that you possessed a heart! Go your own way, then; starve yourself of all happiness, die, for the sake of your husband, the man who has cast you off. But—you remember the old days; I was always something of a prophet, and my predictions came to pass—I tell you this: a trouble—one *I* could have averted—is hanging over you still. You shake your head, you have suffered to the extent of suffering. Bah! in all hearts there is one assailable point. You are not superhuman, *ma reine*. It is possible that your husband, the man who loved you once, may be nearer than you dream, and thinking other thoughts than yours."

What could he mean? Margaret looked up wildly, for he was turning from her to the winding path that led down the sand-cliff to the sea. "Stay, stay!" she cried.

He looked round at her. "Madam," he said politely, with the bow of a courtier, "it is my turn to be obdurate. I would fain obey you—I cannot: your refusal of all friendly offices has sealed my lips, and time presses. Farewell! The humblest of all your devotees kisses your hands and wishes you joy."

PART II.

A MAN AT WAR WITH HIMSELF.

CHAPTER I.

MAURICE GREY.

But the living and the lost—
  For *them* our souls must weep;
For them we suffer a yearning pain
  That will not let us sleep.

A CHANGE. From the shores of the gray British seas to those of the grayer Baltic—from the yellow sands and purple moors of Yorkshire to the wellnigh boundless forests and plains of Western Russia—thousands of miles of wood, lake and river, only diversified by some few castles and villages.

It was July, hot and radiant, but in the depths of those woods coolness is always attainable. By one of the broad silver lakes, under a group of birches that rose gracefully from its shores, a young man was resting through the noontide.

He appeared to be a hunter, for his horse was tethered to one of the trees and a brace of fine hounds were baying out their impatience at his side. But for these dumb companions he seemed to be alone, and yet all the accessories spoke of comfort. A kind of table had been extemporized at his feet, and on it a large meat-pasty, some bread and salt, a knife and fork and a flask of sherry were lying. He had not done much justice to the provisions; he was leaning back against the tree and looking out over the lake, a kind of disgust in his fine face. Suddenly, bethinking himself, he raised two fingers to his lips and gave a prolonged whistle.

It brought from the surrounding woods two stately-looking Russians, long-bearded and sedate. Their master pointed to the provisions before him—a gesture which was evidently understood without difficulty, for they carried away the food, retired respectfully to some distance, and soon made a great inroad into both pasty and bread, packing up what was left in a small haversack which one of them carried on his back. The other then approached his master and made a low bow.

"Time to mount?" said the young man, evidently English from his appearance and accent. "Ha! so much the better."

The horse was untethered, wiped down admiringly, and held in readiness by the bearded Russian, his companion in the mean time bringing out two stout little ponies from the trees. And in a few moments the small cavalcade was ranging the woods.

The black eagle was flapping its great wings above them, feathered fowl of a thousand varieties were twittering on the branches of the trees. Many of the coverts might harbor the wolf or lynx; in the reach of meadow to which a forest-glade might lead the gigantic elk would probably be resting with her young.

It was a position to exhilarate the coldest brain, and the Englishman, who took the lead into the forest, did not look particularly torpid.

He was monarch, too, of all he surveyed, for one of the hospitable nobles of Courland had given his guest a free permission to shoot not only through his estates, which were sufficiently vast, but through those of his neighbors; indeed, the whole province was free to Maurice Grey. With gun and dogs he might traverse the wilds of Courland in all their length and breadth.

To an Englishman, a lover of sport for its own sake, could any position be more delightful? He seemed to feel this. Mounted on his horse, a fine little mare of Arab extraction, his keen sportsman's eye scanning the depths of wood, his ear intent on the faintest sound, he looked another man from the jaded, weary traveller resting listlessly on the shores of the silver lake.

But the dogs looked uneasy; there was a rustling in the underwood; the dry fallen leaves crackled ominously. He cocked his gun. Hist! a long, gray-looking animal, gliding ghost-like out of the bush, but not within range. It was a fierce she-wolf—the terror of the neighborhood; this the Englishman discovered, and then the chase began. The wily dogs urged her out into the open; bewildered she fled before them—long, swift, seemingly untiring. With bellies to the ground, and legs that seemed barely to skim it, followed the noble hounds, and after them their master, urging them on by his voice, till dogs, wolf and horseman seemed to fly over the plain.

On, on, leaving the Russian servants and ponies in the far distance, the forest behind, the blue distance before them, till at last the wolf grew weary, her pace perceptibly flagged: she tried to stand at bay, but exhaustion overcame her; the hounds were on her haunches; they pinned her to the ground till the voice of their master called them off, and a shot put an end for ever to the robber of Russian hen-roosts and the terror of Russian babies.

Various other feats were performed that day, each exciting in its kind; and when the young Englishman, who had ridden far into the short, bright night of that season, rested at last in a kind of log-built hunting-lodge, where the hospitable owner of the estate had always a few necessaries in readiness for the guests of the hunt, he was quite ready for refreshment and repose. He partook of the provisions put before him by his servants, bathed in the river that flowed at no great distance, and laid himself down to rest, rejoicing in the glorious solitude, in the freedom from anxiety, in the triumph of having found one pursuit that could put to flight, even for a time, haunting care and cruel retrospect.

But the triumph was short. The few hours of night passed, and kindly sleep would hold his restless spirit no longer. With the gray dawning Maurice lifted his head from his couch and looked around him. The Russian servants, wrapped in sheepskins, were lying on mats at his feet, fast asleep; even the hounds were silent and motionless, wearied with their day of hard work. The neighborhood of the sleepers was oppressive. He rose and wandered out into the little clearing in the midst of which the hut was built.

Yes, this was solitude, true solitude, without excitement of any kind to fill it; and as Maurice looked listlessly at the sun rising over the woods he tried to persuade himself that it was delightful. Far from the babble of false men and falser women, not even the rising of a thin wreath of smoke in the far distance telling of their existence,—this was what he had been seeking, and hitherto seeking in vain. He seated himself on the trunk of a fallen tree to look this great loneliness in the face and realize the comfort of his position, but it would not do.

Insensibly, as he thought and gazed, came visions of the past, dreams of the future, like weird, shapeless demons whom memory had robed in horrors to rob him of his peace and fill his solitude with care. For Maurice Grey had loved as some men can and do love, throwing all the strength of their nature into this one thing. And he had lost, not by the hand of death—so pitiless when put forth to take the loved—but by a something more dread, more pitiless still—the discovery of his lady's falsehood. Oh, he had honored her, trusted her, given her his all; and what had he found? That through the long years they had passed together in such perfect harmony her heart had been not his, but another's. He had given all; she had given nothing—worse than nothing. And in the bitter revulsion of feeling consequent on the discovery he had not waited for explanations; he had left her, vowing, in a vow that came from the very depths of his stricken heart, not to look upon her fair, false face again.

Since then he had been striving after forgetfulness. He would not hear of her, he would not ask about her. In the various business letters that necessarily passed between him and his solicitor in England—for he was a man of some property—*her* name was never mentioned. He had left amply sufficient for her maintenance. The property she had brought was paid over to her without the slightest reference to him. Thus, he considered, bare duty was fulfilled, and for anything further—bah! woman-like, would she not rejoice in the absence of restraint? It was possible that he might desire to have a voice in the education of his child; about his wife he would trouble himself no further.

But the mind is volatile and independent; it receives not the "Thou shalt not" with which poor mortals would fetter it. Over flood and field, through cities and solitudes, Maurice had been wandering with this one idea—to banish for ever from his mind the beautiful, haunting face of his lost Margaret—and all was in vain. More persistently than ever it returned on this morning in the wilds, looking at him with her lustrous eyes, speaking to him with her sweet, low voice, maddening him with the cruel recollections it brought of loss and shame.

For in a case of this kind the man is, perhaps, a greater sufferer than the woman. True, he can wander hither and thither, throwing himself into the stirring life of the world—business, pleasure, excitement; but in the deep, strong nature the sting remains, bitter, poignant, ever present; not the soft sadness of the weaker sex, which in many cases, stooping down under the stroke, reaps the reward of submission in a certain gradual dulling of the pain; but the fierce, angry plunging of a soul that will not yield to dire necessity—that will not look its sorrow in the face and bear it.

And no trial is fitter to raise this ceaseless tempest in the spirit than that under which Maurice was smarting. He had trusted in her as he trusted in his God; she had been to him the embodiment of all that is good, pure, beautiful in womankind, and the discovery of her treachery was like the breaking away of solid ground from beneath his feet.

From that moment he believed in nothing. Writhing under the bitter pain of the wound inflicted on him, he would yet show no signs of weakness. He would forget; he would cut the ties that bound him to the past; he would tear her from his heart. In the struggle his nature seemed to change. He whom Margaret had loved for his gentle thoughtfulness, his manly courage, his geniality, his bright, joyous spirit, became another man. Irritable, morose, cynical, gayest among the gay at the festive season, though of his laughter it might have been said that it was mad, of his mirth that it was "the crackling of thorns under a pot;" at other times dull and listless, uneasy, changeable, passionate. These were some of his characteristics after many months' wandering. And he felt the change; sometimes he professed to rejoice in it. He told himself that he was getting hardened -that soon, soon, the past would be as though it had not been; but there was a secret consciousness within which told him that this could not be.

Such was the feeling which spoke to him on that still July morning through the solitude till he could bear his own society no longer. He returned to the hut, awoke his servants with some roughness, and intimated to them, in the best Russian he could command, that he was tired of wandering; he would return to their lord's castle that day, and then join him and his family in St. Petersburg.

The Russians bowed simultaneously. They were accustomed to the caprices of their lord, and did not show the least surprise at this sudden termination, after two or three days, of an excursion that was to have lasted at least a fortnight.

They escorted their lord's guest to the castle, and on the same evening Maurice Grey left it for a St. Petersburg mansion.

CHAPTER II.

SOCIETY VERSUS SOLITUDE.

Come, let us to the hills, where none but God
Can overlook us; for I hate to breathe
The breaths and think the thoughts of other men.

A few days later and the wilds of Courland were given up, as far as Maurice Grey was concerned, to the animals that ranged them; he was in St. Petersburg, installed as a welcome guest in the grand city mansion of Count ——, one of the Courland nobles, his son, who had mixed in the best society of both London and Paris, having been for some time one of Maurice Grey's warmest friends.

Into the gay life of his brilliant city the young man welcomed his English friend with the utmost cordiality, and Maurice was soon immersed in a round of gayeties. It was a good time to see St. Petersburg, for all the misery of the spring melting of ice and snow was over. The stately Neva, clear as crystal and covered with craft of every description, was flowing in full magnificence after its winter sleep through the streets and piazzas of the city. The highways were full of vehicles, from the grand carriage-and-four of the general or prince to the plain hired droshki that seemed ubiquitous. Pleasure was the order of the day in the city, for all, high and low, rich and poor, were revelling in the charms of the short-lived summer-time.

Maurice threw himself into this new life with the utmost eagerness. French is the language of the *crême de la crême* in St. Petersburg, and as he was master of the seductive mistress of conversation, his ignorance of Russian by no means interfered with any of his amusements. And he entered into them thoroughly. Lounging about on the Prospekt or Grand English Quay in the morning with a few young Russians; flirting with pretty French coquettes, or rarer Russian beauties, in the ladies' afternoon receptions; floating at night in the grand barge of one of the princes on the wide Neva, in company of the fair and gay and to the sounds of delicious music; dancing far into the morning and supping with the dawn;—this was the life of St. Petersburg, and for some days he enjoyed it thoroughly. One thing was certain: it allowed very little time for thought. But he had not the constitution or power of endurance of some of his Russian friends. A week or two of this hard life knocked him up. He was compelled to rest, whether he would or no. And then reaction came. The crowd and bustle were once more hateful to him. Biliousness, that great foe of the fashionable, cast its jaundiced veil over his eyes. He began to loathe the luxurious saloons and crowded rooms and made-up beauties—to long again for his own society, for the scenes of Nature, for the solitude from which he had only just escaped.

> "Be thine own heart thy palace, or the world's a jail,"

said the great Shakespeare. The world was a jail to Maurice Grey because of the bitterness his heart contained; and, unhappily, go where we will, we cannot escape the world, or that throbbing, torturing consciousness of good and evil, of pain and delight, that mortals call the heart. He could not hide his cynicism; like the thorn that the rose-leaves conceal, it peeped out when it was least expected, and the fair ladies with whose society he pleased himself began gayly to question him on the mysterious cause of his gloomy ideas.

This alarmed Maurice. His wound was of such a kind as to be sensitive to the lightest touch. He could not bear that what he looked upon as his dishonor should be the common talk of his associates. It was this that had made him leave England and break all connection with those who had known him there. When, therefore, it became the custom of his fair St. Petersburg friends to question him curiously about his past, to suggest a probable history in his dark, melancholy eyes, to speak to him with sentimental pathos about life and love, he took fright; and to the grief of his many friends—for the Englishman had become the fashion in St. Petersburg—announced his intention of departure. Loud and long was the opposition, and Maurice grew weary of the delay and sick of the great city before his friends would allow him to go; but at last they were left behind him. With no companion, not even a servant this time, he was travelling through the length and breadth of Russia, by her scattered cities and vast plains, to Moscow, the ancient capital; there only a few hours, and then on once more, for Russia had become distasteful to him.

He would scarcely pause, for he was in a fever to be on, on and away, far from the vexations of "towered cities" and their "busy hum"—far, if it were possible, even from men. There was a little village that he had known in happier days. It was far up in the Swiss mountains; it was lonely, save for the coming and going of tourists, and even these did not honor it with their presence for long. Two glaciers stooped down into its valley, and it was watched evermore by pillars of purest snow. There, perhaps, in the savage grandeur of holy Nature, he might find the rest for which he craved, and with a feverish anxiety he pressed on to his goal.

Switzerland at last!—a mountain-pass, snow-crowned hills, land-locked lakes and white foaming torrents. A certain satisfaction glowed in the breast of the world-weary man as he looked out upon it all.

He and his sorrow seemed dwarfed, for the moment, by the grand magnificence of the world as God made it—not the world of cities, but the world of Nature. *His* hand was visible in the grouping of the Alpine giants, in the variegated beauty of their hidden vales, and beneath that hand the traveller felt himself.

Of carriages and mules he would have none. With his staff in his hand he crossed the mountains, courting the healthy physical weariness, sure precursor of that which denies itself to the brain overwrought by excitement—blessed sleep. And with the exertion and consequent rest his health returned, his muscles played freely, Life carried on her great functions with ease. By the time he had reached Grindelwald, the little village in which he intended to stay for some time, even some of his cynicism had melted. Doubtless it was only for the time. Nature can do much, but she cannot really draw the sting of bitter aching from the heart, or give back to the spirit the brightness and elasticity of that fresh time when men are divine and women are earth-angels, and the world is a region of enchantment, a "palace of delights;" even the eternal snows and the grand sights and sounds of the mountain-country may pall upon the eyes and sicken the disappointed heart. For in human nature are the elements of the divine—its infinite cravings only the Infinite can fill. Beautiful as God's world may be, it is powerless to fill the heart or satisfy the soul of man. Hither and thither he may wander; like the dying poet Shelley's marvellous creation,

> "Nature's most secret steps
> He, like her shadow, may pursue;"

and yet for the haunting vision, the great unfound loveliness. the unfelt joy, his spirit may sicken unceasingly.

PART III.

A DOUBLE MYSTERY.

CHAPTER I.

PARTIAL DISCOVERIES.

She seemed to be all nature,
And all varieties of things in one;
Would set at night in clouds of tears, and rise
All light and laughter in the morning; fear
No petty customs nor appearances,
But think what others only dreamed about,
And say what others did but think, and do
What others would but say, and glory in
What others dared but do.

"I HAVE no sympathy for you, Adèle—not the slightest."

So spoke Mrs. Churchill, standing by a sofa in her boudoir with a glass of port in the one hand and a bottle of quinine in the other, giving careful attention to the dripping of a certain number of drops from the bottle to the glass.

Her young daughter was on the sofa, looking rather languid and worn. She raised her head, supporting it on her elbow, and her voice was a little peevish as she answered, "I have told you, mamma, that I don't want either sympathy or medicine."

"In the name of all that's sensible try and tell me what you *do* want, child!"

"I want to see Arthur." Adèle blushed as she spoke.

"To see Arthur, indeed!" Here Mrs. Churchill passed the carefully-prepared dose to her daughter. "You are a pretty pair! I imagine he wants quinine and sea-air as much as you do. And now, forsooth, he must turn studious, ambitious of literary distinction, and what not. The next thing I shall hear about him is that he has taken to the editing of a popular journal. Really, young people of the present day are past my comprehension altogether, and, Adèle, you and Arthur carry matters to the verge of absurdity. You fall in love simultaneously with a pretty widow—whether a widow or not, Goodness alone knows—you suspend your own engagement for a time, as you assure one another, by mutual consent, and then begin the process of fading away, Arthur throwing himself into literature, and you into so-called charity; but, my dear"—here Mrs. Churchill grew severe—"*I* have always heard that charity begins at home. If charity consists in making your mother's life miserable, and allowing all kinds of absurd notions in the head of the man who is to be your husband (for I believe that these new follies can't possibly outlive your teens), then, so far as I am concerned, the less of charity the better."

Adèle during this harangue had turned her face from her mother. The answer came from the depths of the sofa-cushion in which she had buried her face: "I wish I hadn't told you, mamma."

"Happily, I found out the greater part for myself." Mrs. Churchill was still severe. "Upon my word, Adèle, it was dutiful to begin such a correspondence without your mother's consent or knowledge; but perhaps I have spoken and thought enough on that subject already. Apropos of this Mrs. Grey of yours, I have heard something which will probably interest you. Of course it is not for me to say whether her name is really Mrs. Grey, but some of the incidents in the stories I heard seem to fit in rather strangely."

"Mamma!" In Adèle's excitement she rose to a sitting posture on the sofa and her cheeks flamed suddenly into an angry crimson. "You may say what you like; *I* know that Margaret Grey is good and true, and it's too bad to believe in nobody."

Her excitement rather alarmed good Mrs. Churchill. "Adèle! Adèle!" she said, "*do*, like a good child, make an effort to be reasonable. The next thing will be brain fever if you excite yourself in this way. Silly little goose! try and believe that your mother knows more of the world than you do. Some of these days you will be wiser."

"Never so wise, I hope, as to think ill of everybody," said Adèle, half sobbing after her excitement.

"Well! well!" said her mother soothingly, "only be patient and I will admit that everybody is angelic; indeed, after all, why should I take the trouble of pointing out the fallacy? Circumstances will do that for you before you have lived many more years in the world. But about this Mrs. Grey. Very good I must call her to spare your feelings, and doubtless very beautiful, or she could not have taken such violent possession of the heart and head of my impulsive little daughter. It is a pity, by the bye, Adèle, that Providence did not see fit to make you a boy. It would have been possible then for you to have devoted life and fortune to this interesting person, only I'm not so sure that there's not a lingering weakness for Arthur in your contradictory little heart. There, my dear! don't blush about it; you will certainly have no roses for the evening if you expend them so liberally now, and pale cheeks don't suit your style."

"As if I cared about my style, mamma!"

"Well, if you don't, Adèle, I do; and as, at your age, rouge would be rather absurd, I must beg you to give us some of those pretty little blushes this evening. Perhaps you may be able to persuade Arthur to leave his books for a few hours and escort us to Lady C——'s. Is music, by the bye, among the vanities to which he has sworn undying hatred? Signor Mario has promised her a song, and—ah! I am so bad at names!—the great violinist—you remember, Mr. Godolphin was so wild about him—has promised to attend. But really, Adèle," Mrs. Churchill gave an impatient sigh, "one might think you a worn-out woman of the world, or six seasons out at least; you take not the slightest interest in anything I tell you."

Adèle reddened: "I beg your pardon, mamma. No doubt it will be pleasant, and the beautiful new necklace you gave me to-day will be the very thing to wear. If Arthur comes in I shall ask him; but what were you saying a few minutes ago about Mrs. Grey?"

"That interests you far more than either soirée or necklace, I do believe. I wonder how it is, Adèle, that you are so *very* different from other girls at your age? What I have heard is, after all, not much; and mind, if it excites you I shall leave off telling you *at once.* It does not redound particularly to the credit of your friend."

Again Adèle buried her face in the sofa-pillow: "Who told you, mamma?"

"You remember that handsome young Russian at Mrs. Gordon's the other night. He took me in to supper, and we got into conversation. Very frank and open these foreigners are—there is none of that English reserve about them. He told me at once what brought him to London. It seems he is in search of an English friend, a certain Maurice Grey, who, after having made himself quite the rage in St. Petersburg (he was staying with the young count's father), suddenly disappeared, leaving no trace behind him. He would not let his friends know where he was going, nor did he write a single line to tell of his safe arrival at any point in his journey. It appears that one and another in St. Petersburg began talking about him, and it came out that he had let fall certain mysterious hints about a great sorrow, weariness of life, and so on—in your romantic style, Adèle. Whether he only wished to make himself interesting to the ladies—who seem to have been the chief movers of the rumor—does not precisely appear: I should think it highly probable. However, St. Petersburg society took a different view. When a week passed and nothing was heard of Maurice Grey, his friends killed him—that is, they determined among themselves that he had killed himself. There seems to have been quite a fever of anxiety about the young man's fate. At last the young count, to satisfy his fair relatives and friends—himself also, for he firmly believes in his English guest, mystery and all—came over here, thinking that in London he might find some clue to his whereabouts. And now comes the part of the story which may perhaps fit in with yours. There are a good many Greys, so I did not particularly interest myself until Count —— informed me by way of sequel that during a former visit of his to London his friend, Maurice Grey, had married one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. It was, of course, the prevailing idea in St. Petersburg that a woman had something to do with the Englishman's gloom, and as he never made the faintest allusion to his wife, it had been presumed that her conduct after marriage had caused a separation or a scandal of some kind. Count —— has set on foot an inquiry about this person. Mrs. Grey—Margaret, he told me, was her Christian name—must certainly be still living. He heard of her from her man of business, but her place of residence is, for some reason, kept a profound secret."

Adèle had risen from the sofa. She was listening to her mother's tale with earnest eyes fixed on her face. When it was over she gave a low, deep-drawn sigh: "Maurice, mamma? Are you sure his name was Maurice?"

"The Englishman's, Adèle? Yes, Count —— called him by that name once or twice in the course of our conversation."

Adèle clasped her hands: "Then there can be no doubt it is the same. That will explain her sadness. Some fearful misunderstanding has come between them. Oh how I wish I could see Count ——! or if Arthur would only come! Perhaps—mamma, how delightful it would be!—perhaps we shall be able to set it all right—to make her happy again!"

Mrs. Churchill groaned: "I thought my story would have had the effect of curing you, Adèle; and now I believe you are actually farther gone than ever with your enthusiasm and your poetic notions. *When* shall I teach you that all this is childish? '*Perhaps* you will set all right'—'make her life happy!' Perhaps, rather, you will obey your mother, and have nothing further to do with a person who has deceived her husband and is otherwise not at all correct. Why, if I don't very much mistake—and I can say, without boasting, I think that I am always pretty well up in these matters—before the season is over your Mrs. Grey will be the talk of every dinner-table in London, for Count —— tells his story freely, and he seems to have the *entrée* everywhere. 'Miss Churchill's particular friend'—that would be a pleasant addition to the tale when repeated with sundry additions, my dear, in our circle of acquaintance. Thank Goodness! Arthur is the only person who knows anything of your absurd adventure, and his tongue is happily tied."

Adèle looked up indignantly: "Don't think that *I* shall hide from anybody my friendship for Margaret Grey," she said; "*you* may feel ashamed—*I* glory in it. All I regret is that I did so little for her when I had the opportunity." Then, softening, "If you had once seen her, mamma, you could never have believed these cruel tales."

"I should have instantly fallen under the spell, no doubt, like you and Arthur? No, Adèle, it is long since a pretty face affected me so powerfully; indeed, I never remember being so absurdly romantic as you are. But, dear me! there are visitors; you look rather pale, so I suppose, for this one afternoon, I must let you off and leave you here with your book."

Mrs. Churchill really loved her daughter, though she did not quite understand her, but she was certainly tolerably gentle toward what she looked upon as her follies. She stooped and kissed her on the brow before she left the room, saying, with something between a smile and a sigh, "Ah, my dear, perhaps some day you will understand your mother better."

Adèle returned the caress affectionately, but it was a relief to her when the door of her mother's boudoir closed behind her and she was left alone to think and plan, for the story of the Russian had thrown a new light on the subject that had engrossed her so much since that May afternoon in the Academy.

CHAPTER II.

GO AND SEE HER.

Love's very pain is sweet.

Miss Churchill was not allowed to indulge long in the luxury of solitude. Her mother had scarcely left her before there was a well-known knock at the hall door, followed after a few moments' interval by a short, intimate tap at the door of the sitting-room, and Adèle rose from her sofa and held out both hands eagerly to greet her cousin.

Perhaps he did not respond with sufficient warmth to her impulsive welcome, for the light of pleasure died quickly out of her face, she sank languidly into a chair and plunged headlong into commonplaces. "Are you going to Lady C——'s to-night, Arthur?" she asked; "I hear there's to be some first-rate music."

"That means, I suppose, that you and Aunt Ellen want an escort."

"That *means* nothing of the kind, Arthur. Surely mamma is old enough to take care of herself and me without *your* assistance."

"Pray don't take offence at such a small thing, Adèle. They say, you know, that people who take offence lightly are in want of a real grievance."

"Heaven knows I needn't look far for a grievance when you are concerned," said Adèle bitterly.

"You are the most forbearing of your sex, my fair cousin," returned he with provoking coolness. "In humble emulation of your patience behold me a willing listener to this list of grievances."

He spoke with a half smile, then threw himself back in an arm-chair and assumed an appearance of rapt attention; but Adèle turned away to hide a treacherous tear. "I wonder how it is that we never meet without quarrelling now," she said plaintively.

He shrugged his shoulders: "That, I fancy, is your affair, my little cousin; you seem to take a delight in snapping me up, now-a-days; which being the case, what can I do but submit and give your woman's wit material to work upon?"

Adèle pouted: "Of course it is anybody's fault but your own, Arthur; but that's always the way with boys—*they* can't possibly be in fault."

Arthur rose from his seat: "This may be, and no doubt is, highly interesting to you, Adèle. I can't say that I feel the charm of sparring; but then, as you politely observe, I am only a boy, and boys are often unappreciative of women's fine sallies, therefore I think the *boy* must beg to be excused."

He held out his hand. Adèle was on the point of taking him at his word and allowing him to leave her, but when she looked up at him her mood changed suddenly, for, after all, only her affection had made her peevish. It was a difficult task Adèle had set herself on that day when Arthur first let her into the secret of his love. She had begun grandly. In her, as in many of her sisters, the spirit of self-sacrifice was strong. On the altar of her great love for her cousin, her enthusiastic admiration for the woman of his choice, she had been ready to immolate everything; she would throw her own wishes, her hopes, her future joy to the winds, so that they might be happy; and if in that first moment she could have consummated her sacrifice, could have given them one to the other, she would have done it freely, whatever it might have cost herself. But the daily annoyance her sacrifice entailed; the obligation of listening to her cousin's rhapsodies; the knowledge that though with her in body his mind was far away; even the light way in which he treated her unselfish exertions in his interest,—all these were somewhat hard to bear.

In the conflict Adèle's health was giving way; she grew peevish and irritable. Her gayety and lightheartedness departed, she was not the amusing companion she had once been, and her cousin's visits were in consequence fewer. When he *did* come, it was only to pour out his heart on the subject which engrossed him—Margaret Grey. Generally she listened patiently, with an appearance of interest and sympathy; and this was all he desired. Arthur did not mean to be unkind—he was one of the most good-natured of his sex—but he had been so much accustomed to consider that what interested him would of necessity interest Adèle that he could not have thought he was giving her pain, and with his every visit planting pin-pricks in her poor little heart.

When, therefore, as sometimes happened in these days—for Adèle's weakness was beginning to prey upon her nerves—she showed herself impatient, was unsympathetic or irritable, Arthur was, as on this occasion, surprised and offended, and deprived her for some days of the pleasure of his society.

But this time Adèle would not let him go off in ill-temper. She looked up, and her woman's heart was moved to self-forgetfulness. "Don't go yet, dear," she said, her voice trembling in spite of strenuous efforts to be calm; "you must forgive my pettishness. I think what mamma says is true. I can't be very well just now. And *you* look pale and ill, my poor old fellow; you shut yourself up too much with your books. You should leave London and go to some seaside place for a time."

"I scarcely think the *books* are to blame, Adèle." Arthur gave a little sigh and glanced furtively at the mirror. Through all his new earnestness he had preserved the boyish weakness of a certain pleasure in interesting delicacy. "One must do something," he continued, pacing the room restlessly, "and I've been too long an idle good-for-nothing. I think I have literary tastes. I have been looking up the classics with a view to a novel—something in Bulwer's style, you know, the scene laid in Athens during her palmy days; or perhaps Palmyra, with all the details in the true antique. My heroine must be Greek, fine classic features, and that kind of thing. I have a grand description in my head. Shall I give it to you?"

Adèle smiled: "I think I could give it myself. Certainly I know the model. Am I right?"

Arthur had taken a seat again; he buried his head in his hands: "I have had such a mad idea, Adèle. But no; to do *her* justice in any description would be impossible, absolutely impossible. It's easy enough to write about dark eyes and fine features and golden hair, but that would not be Margaret. It is the wonderful look in her face, that kind of spiritual beauty belonging neither to form nor coloring, which gives it its chief charm."

"You are eloquent, dear," said Adèle with a little sigh; "if you write your book in that way, I think it must certainly be a success."

"Yes," said he pensively, "the public like reality, but, you see, one can't always give it. These kinds of things look cold on paper. If I could show you my multitudinous attempts in prose and verse to give some idea of her! but they were all poor and wishy-washy. The greater number enriched the ashes of my grate. I *am* a good-for-nothing, and I *shall be* a good-for-nothing to the end of the chapter."

There was something of weariness and bitter self-contempt in Arthur's voice. It made Adèle's heart ache for him. She knelt down by his side and put one of her arms round his neck. It was more the gesture of a tender little mother with ner child than of a woman with the man she loves, for this protecting motherliness was one great element in the affection of Adèle for her cousin. No doubt it was this in a great measure that rendered it so unselfish. As a little child she had taken upon herself the punishment of his small faults—as a grown-up girl she sought to shield him from every kind of ill.

"Don't despair, dear," she said gently; "there is something for you to do—to do for *her*, if you can be wise and generous, and put yourself out of the way altogether. Do you remember, Arthur" (Adèle's voice grew soft and the tears were in her eyes), "how you used to come and sit here in the afternoon while I read to you from the *Faërie Queene* about those grand young knights going out in search of adventures—to rescue women and kill dragons and evil things? And sometimes we used to wish that those days would come back, and I imagined how I would send you out, all clothed in bright armor, to do great deeds in the world. Dear, I think your time for this has come. You are a true knight, you will forget yourself, you will burn to redress a great wrong—especially when she, your Margaret, is the victim."

Adèle's words were exciting. Arthur could barely listen with patience to the end of her tender little harangue, for a great light was burning behind it which set his spirit on flame. "Adèle," he cried eagerly, "you have heard something new about her. Tell me at once."

"I heard it from mamma," she answered. And then, in as few words as possible, she repeated the story of the young Russian. "I have no doubt whatever about Margaret Grey being the Mrs. Grey in question," she said in conclusion. "You remember what I told you about her strange cry when she thought she was alone in the room. Maurice Grey must be her husband. My idea is this: a misunderstanding is at the bottom of their misery—for *he* is evidently as miserable as she is—brought about by some one who was in love with her before—that tall man, very likely, who looked in at the window and frightened her so much. A person who knew them both might possibly remove this and restore them to happiness. Arthur, *you* must be that person. There is only *one* drawback: *if* the people in St. Petersburg should be right? if he has killed himself? Can you conceive anything more dreadful, she loving him all the time, as I know she does?" The idea turned Adèle pale, but the hopefulness of youth reasserted itself. "I can't bring myself to believe it," she said earnestly. "He got tired of all his friends and the gayety, and they teased him, I dare say. It's not like an Englishman to put an end to himself in that kind of way. No; I feel convinced that he will be found yet; and, Arthur, *you* must find him."

While Adèle had been speaking Arthur had turned away from her. He was standing by the window, apparently watching the passers-by, but she could see, by the glimpse of his face that was still visible, that he was listening with intense interest.

A fierce struggle was going on in his heart. Adèle had often let him know that in her earnest belief all his hopes were futile. Arthur had hoped against hope. In spite of all she could say—in spite even of the cruel facts that supported her theory—he reared in secret his airy fabric of hopes and dreams. He would work—work day by day and hour by hour. He should be known for a student, an author, a man of genius; not as a boy, but as a man, with an acknowledged place in the world—a man worthy of her, if that were possible (which fact the ardent lover of both sexes is wont to doubt)—he would present himself before her with the tale of his ever-faithful love.

She would be weary of solitude, she would be touched with his perseverance, she would grant him all he could desire. It was thus he always crowned his edifice, though the number of ways to its summit might have been named Legion. Now painting, now poetry, now science, now politics, would be the friendly genius that might bring him at last to her feet.

And in one moment the whole was changed. He was called upon to forget his dream or to expunge his own name from the fluted columns of his mansion in the clouds—never an easy task. I wonder who builds these *châteaux en Espagne* without self for at least one of the habitants.

Unhappily, Adèle's tale carried conviction. But "None are so blind as those who *will* not see." Arthur *could* not believe, because he would not. He did not answer for a few moments, then he turned, with a light laugh that sorely belied a certain haggard look in his young face: "*You* had better turn novelist, Adèle. Your *plots* would certainly be first-rate. Why, you have reared a mountain of certainty out of a grain of conjecture. I don't believe it," he continued fiercely. But in his very fierceness was the contradiction of his words. "You pretend to care for her, and yet you can listen to all these foolish tales!"

It was rather an unkind accusation, since Adèle had been doing her very utmost to show how implicitly she believed in Margaret's innocence and truth; but pain blinded Arthur for the moment, and made him cruel and unjust.

Adèle saw how it was with him, and she did not even appear to resent his words. "Sit down again, Arthur dear," she said gently. "I am as anxious as you can be to get to the bottom of this mystery, but if we would do anything we must be calm and have our wits about us."

"Say, rather, *I* must," returned Arthur, throwing himself down on a small chair at her feet and seizing one of her hands in a sudden access of penitence. "What a brute I am, exciting you in this way, my poor pale little cousin! Adèle, you are wise and kind: I put myself in your hands. What shall I do?"

Adèle's lips quivered as if with a sudden pain, but the answer came out clear and firm: "Go and see her, Arthur; find out the truth about all this. I think when you have once heard her story you will be in no further difficulty."

Arthur started up, his eyes glittering: "Shall I, Adèle? Can I? What if I offend her?"

"You will not, Arthur. Take my advice; this time, I think, it coincides with your own will. Pass me my writing-desk, dear. Here! this is the address I have kept from you so long. Take it, my poor old fellow, and go."

He took it up and looked at it with gleaming eyes, for behind it he seemed to see the vision for which he had been thirsting so long. Adèle had thrown herself back upon the sofa; she looked pale and exhausted. From the little piece of paper Arthur had been studying so earnestly he turned his eyes to her. Something in her pale face touched him

He felt a sudden pang of self-reproach, and kneeling down by her side he pressed one of her hands to his lips: "Adèle, you are an angel! I say it in sober earnest, worthy of one far better and worthier and nobler than I. Dear little cousin, I will take your advice. You shall see me again only when my fate is sealed—when I have seen her. Forgive me, and keep a little corner of your heart for me till my return."

"Good-bye, dear."

It was all Adèle could say for the tears that would not be restrained. But she was happier. There was a feeling of settled calm in her heart to which it had long been a stranger. She had done what she could; she was willing to leave the rest.

He left her then, and she rose from the sofa to prepare for dinner and the gayeties of the evening.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE IS EMPTY.

All within is dark as night,
In the windows is no light,
And no murmur at the door,
So frequent on its hinge before.

And in the mean time what was *she* doing, the object of all this solicitude, the unconscious origin of so many storms of feeling?

We left her on the seashore, the wide ocean before her, the cool sands around her, with a white face and quivering nerves, and a heart that was sick with aching. For the interview had tried her sorely, and it left behind it no luminous trail, but rather a deep shadow that seemed for the moment to kill even the faint hope which her spirit had cherished through all its woe.

What she looked upon as her own miserable weakness terrified her—filled her with a certain vague fear of such depths of darkness before her as hitherto she had never known. Pitfalls seemed yawning on every side. She was to herself like one who was drifting on alone, unprotected—not even shielded by her woman's weakness—to meet some terrible fate. Sitting there, her head buried in her hands, she shivered and moaned, for the remembrance of that moment of weakness, when, as it seemed, only a trifle had saved her from listening to the honeyed words of the tempter, and putting herself partially, at least, in his power, filled her with the bitterest humiliation.

Another remembrance agitated her cruelly as she cast her thoughts over the interview. His last words had implied a mystery which her tortured brain strove in vain to fathom.

Her husband, Laura's father! had the child's instinct been true? Could he be near them? and if so, what did the threat mean? Could he, her Maurice, have sought her with any but a friendly object? Yet this was what her tormentor had foreshadowed in his mysterious words. She could not cast them aside as unmeaning, the poison thrown out in the anger of disappointment, for she knew L'Estrange. He never spoke meaninglessly, and therefore his words had weight. Besides, he was one who understood his kind—who could trace with the keen eye of a master the purposes of those with whom he came into contact.

Observation and deduction had been carried by this strange man to such an extent in the course of his ceaseless wanderings, that at last they had reached almost the rank of a science. In ancient days his acuteness would have earned for him the unenviable notoriety of the wizard; men would have imagined that he had dealings with the powers of darkness. Indeed, as it was, Margaret and her friends had often been perfectly astounded by the accuracy of his predictions, based on grounds to them undiscoverable, for they never failed of verification.

Connecting the past with the present, Margaret's brain—unhealthily active in this her hour of deepest misery—began to trace for itself a theory to account for the mysterious words, which clung to it like a subtle poison. He had met her husband, she said to herself; he had found out, by the marvellous power he possessed, that no friendly purpose had brought him to the vicinity of his wife—that he was hostile to her still, that some new misery was in store for her.

But what could it be? *Could* her sufferings be increased?

She had risen from her seat. In the restlessness of her spirit movement seemed a necessity. She had walked with unconscious rapidity to some distance along the shore. Suddenly, as she reached this point in her theory of possibilities, she stopped: covering her face with both hands, she uttered a low cry and sank down upon the grassy edge of the cliff. There had come to her mind, like a fatal knell, one sentence of her tormentor's speech—"In all hearts there is *one* assailable point"—and it brought a picture to her mind.

She seemed to see the pensive, half-melancholy eyes, the golden curls, the graceful, childish form of her little Laura, and as she saw she realized what her affection for the child had become during the last few weeks—how the little one was her hope, her joy, the sheet-anchor of her soul.

But Laura was his. Could it be that he would take away her treasure and punish her afresh by an added loneliness—by letting her know that he felt her unworthy to be the guardian of his child after the age when the young soul is plastic and open to impressions? It was unlike Maurice. Ah, how unlike! pleaded the weary heart; but misery had been known to change men utterly was the answer of the brain, grown morbid by lonely pondering; and that Maurice, with his earnest craving for sympathy, could have been anything but miserable through those long months was impossible.

But he could not remove her without warning. He would see his wife, he would speak to her; Heaven, in its mercy, would give her one more opportunity. This she said to herself as she sat almost helpless by the cliff, crushed by the dreary possibilities which this new presentiment of evil had brought to her mind. And with this idea came a desire for action. Even at that moment, as she sat there inert, he might be at the cottage waiting with impatience for her return, wondering at her long absence from his child.

She sprang to her feet and began rapidly to retrace her steps, skirting the sand-cliff that rose up from the shore. By this time evening had come. The little ones were being marshalled by their nurses for home and bed, two or three loving pairs were pacing the yellow sands, the sun was stooping down in ruddy glory to the rest of his ocean bed, there was a fragrant steam from the fields of clover and cowslip, a hush as of coming repose upon everything; but what can stay the tumult of the soul?

Like the fabled Io of the Greek, she may wander hither and thither, the lulling sounds and the restful sights of Nature may wrap their calm around her, but only externally. When the gad-fly of stinging misery follows evermore in her track, what are all these? Nothing, less than nothing, or a mocking echo of that to which she can never attain.

Something of this Margaret felt that evening as, through the torturing consciousness of a new possibility of anguish, she looked upon the fair outer world. Nature was too calm, too fair—she was antagonistic to the mood of the lonely, suffering woman.

Margaret had wandered farther than she thought, and the sun had already dipped below the western horizon before she saw her cottage. It was lying in the shadow, not touched by the sunset glory. To her imagination, distraught by the experiences of the day, it looked cold and blighted.

She stopped when she saw it. Almost it appeared to her as if she could not go farther to meet the realization of her dread. Everything looked so still—no little white fairy at the garden gate watching for mamma, not a sound among the trees. How could she go on into the desolate solitude? But, after a moment's pause, her strength returned. If the blow had indeed fallen no delay could avert it. On then, up to the little gate, through the garden, with still the same chilling silence. No little face at the window, no sound of merry laughter, no light bounding steps. The hall door was open; she passed in. With haggard face she peered into the rooms, hoping against hope for a sight of that tiny figure.

The child would be asleep perhaps, wearied out by the pleasant fatigue of the bright day: she would be found behind sofa or ottoman or curtains, curled up like a kitten, or tired out with watching for mamma, she had thrown herself down on her little bed. Like one who seeks thirstily for hid treasure, Margaret looked, her soul in her eyes, into every nook and corner of her little domain: corners possible and impossible she searched, for the mother's heart within was crying out, and she could not despair until nothing else would be possible. She was so absorbed in her hopeless task that she did not know she was being watched, that a pair of lynx eyes, in which cool triumph was shining, noted her every movement; that when at last, worn out and despairing, she crept, like one who has received a death-wound, into her sitting-room and threw herself down, almost lost to the knowledge of what she was doing, upon hands and knees to the ground in her exceeding agony, her servant was glorying in her fall, triumphing at her expense; but so it was. Jane Rodgers's hour had come. Her lodger was paying, and paying dearly, for her insolence.

She did not wish to be discovered, and she had seen enough to assure herself that the blow had told. Retreating softly from the hall, with a smile on her lips that was not a pleasant one to look upon, she returned to her comfortable kitchen, leaving her mistress alone in her agony.

Jane Rodgers had one anxiety. She muttered its import to herself as she stooped over the fire to turn a piece of bacon which was frizzing merrily for her tea. "Trouble *do* sometimes kill people; it wouldn't do to have a death in the house, and she looked queer; but there! *she'll* get over it, and perhaps be a trifle civiller for the future."

So even this anxiety, as it appeared, did not affect Jane very severely. She lifted the frying-pan carefully from the fire, placed its contents in a plate that had been warming in the oven, and sat down to enjoy her tea in peace.

To Margaret it seemed as if all the glory had gone from earth True, her desolation had been grievous at times, but she had ever possessed *some* consolation; now in a moment all seemed rent from her. *Hope,* for if he had ever wished to see her again in this world he would not have taken away her little one; *love,* for the clinging affection which had become so precious would nevermore surround her—Laura would be taught to forget, perhaps even to despise, her mother; *peace,* for if her husband was so terribly changed, how would he bring up their daughter? and, doing his very best, *could* he surround her with the watchful care of a woman—a mother?—Laura, as her mother had learned, was so sensitive and tender; *joy,* for she was alone, uncared for, a widowed wife, a childless mother.

One after another came these cruel thoughts to crush her as she crouched down upon the ground, plucking with nervous, aimless fingers at the sofa-trimmings. For the last stroke had told. The poor heart was incapable of bearing more. Margaret's mind was in danger. She was standing, though she knew it not, on the border-land which skirts the dark region of insanity. A little more of this heart-dissecting torture and that numbing, more to be dreaded than the keenest pain, would of necessity be the result, and the beautiful, fair-souled woman be changed, by the mysterious action of disease, into a maniac, a pitiable object in the sight of God and men. Was this last, this bitterest woe reserved for her?

No: suddenly the consciousness of the new danger dawned upon her. She caught the wild, wandering thoughts and sternly brought them to bay; then, shuddering, she threw herself on her knees.

"My God," she cried piteously, "send me death in thy mercy—death before madness—for I can bear no more, no more."

Her voice sank to a sobbing sigh, but the prayer seemed to have stayed the fever of her brain. The white terror left her face; she even smiled to feel the pain deadening, though with the deadening came a chill that froze the warm life-blood in her veins. Her satisfaction was but momentary. She staggered to her feet. Was this, then, the death she had craved? And with a pang she recognized her folly, she would fain have recalled her prayer; for life, sweet life, is precious, even to the wretched, when they are called upon to face the dark reality we call death. Life cannot be utterly reft of hope. To the most forlorn it holds out a future, and what is this future but the possibility of better things to come? The time might yet come when Margaret would be able to look for another and more certain future—a future to which death is but the prelude. That time had not yet arrived. Her treasures, though swept from her grasp by the hand of a wayward fate, were still in the warm lap of earth; and warm is that lap to the heart when its withdrawal is threatened as a something not vaguely distant, but near and certain.

It took but a moment for these thoughts to flash through Margaret's brain, for stealthily the chill crept over her. She made a few steps forward to gain the window, but it was too rapid for her. Gasping, she fell back heavily to the ground.

CHAPTER IV.

JANE'S REVENGE.

For very fear unnethës may she go,
She weeped, wailed, all a day or two,
And swooned, that it ruthe was to see.

JANE RODGERS had discussed the bacon, and, as she was a tidy woman, the plate was put carefully aside for washing while she ruminated quietly over her last cup of tea—a particularly good one, black as ink, hot as an earthenware pot that had been some time on the hob could make it, rendered delicate by a few drops of rich, yellow cream, and extremely palatable by two lumps of white sugar.

Jane was not always so extravagant, but tea was her weak point. Her hard face looked almost pleasant for the moment, she was so thorougly comfortable.

Apparently the meditations that enlivened the kindly cup were of an agreeable nature, for she smiled once or twice, and occasionally cast a glance of infinite content on the dresser, where, nestling among the bright crockery, lay a little knitted purse, from the meshes of which something closely resembling yellow gold was gleaming. A large black cat was purring by the fire; in her satisfaction Jane stooped and stroked its soft fur caressingly. But nothing in the house seemed to be stirring, and, in spite of her pleasant reflections and the abundant comfort that surrounded her, Jane began to feel, as the darkness gathered, a certain creeping sense of uneasiness. She addressed the cat, for when people feel this loneliness even a dumb creature seems a companion. "Pussy," she said, stooping again to caress it, "it's lonesome here to-night. What's *she* doing, I wonder, up there by herself? We'll light the candles and take them up."

As Jane spoke she rose from her seat and stretched out her hand to take the lucifer matches from the chimney-piece. But she did not draw it back so quickly. Her hand was stayed by a sudden horror. The stillness in the house was broken. There came from overhead the sound of a dull thud, as if a body had fallen heavily to the ground. The sound was followed by a silence more oppressive even than before.

Jane Rodgers was a coward, and like many uneducated people extremely superstitious. The sound came from the room where she had left her mistress about half an hour before, "looking," as she had expressed it, "rather queer." She was the only person in the room; the sound had come from a heavy fall. It must, then, have been Mrs. Grey herself who had fallen. Had the trouble crushed her utterly? Was she dead? The bare supposition sent every particle of blood from Jane's face. She turned as pale as death. There rose up, in a grim host before her mind, some of the many ghost-stories that are the terror of the ignorant. If she were dead she would certainly return again to haunt the unfaithful servant, for Jane had a vague idea that death could clear up mysteries. And in what form would the injured lady come? Perhaps every evening at nightfall that sound of heavy falling would be heard, only muffled and terror-laden; perhaps as a sheeted ghost she would haunt the bedside of her unfaithful servant; perhaps— But Jane could scarcely bear to conjecture further; even certainty, however dreadful, would be better than this vague sense of horror.

With a hand made tremulous by fear she lit a candle. From Ajax downward human nature is the same. Whatever be the danger, darkness gives it an added horror. Jane Rodgers with her candle in her hand felt much braver than Jane Rodgers in the dark.

She paused for a moment on the threshold of Mrs. Grey's sitting-room, and applied first her ear and then her eye to the keyhole. Her ear told her that there was within the room a silence as of death; her eye could distinguish nothing through the gloom. In her superstitious horror she was on the point of running away from the door and from the house, but there came another dim perspective of future uneasiness to delay her.

If the lady were indeed dead—and Jane had almost come to this conclusion—it was a fact that could not be hidden. Her body would be found, then the neighbors would talk, the inquest would follow, and the cross-examination about her own whereabouts, as the landlady and servant, at the time of the accident. How would she be able to stand this? Then, if it should be found out that she, the pattern of strong-mindedness, she who talked in the village about her experience and knowledge of the world, who was known far and near as a person equal to any emergency—that she had turned tail like a frightened dog and fled from imaginary dangers, how would she bear the ridicule and contempt of her fellows?

These last considerations decided her; she opened the door of her mistress's sitting-room and peered in cautiously.

What she saw realized for the moment her worst fears. Margaret was stretched on the carpet rigid and motionless, her hands were clenched, her feet were drawn up under her; the attitude was that of one who had suddenly yielded in a struggle with dire agony.

Shading her candle with her hand, for the night-winds were sweeping through the room, and with a face almost as white as that she looked on, Jane Rodgers crept near to the prostrate lady. Jane had seen something of illness, and in her days of domestic service had been considered a good nurse; indeed, she had looked, and looked unflinchingly, on the face of death itself more than once in her life. What alarmed her so much on this occasion was the attendant circumstances, which had called into play the cowardly and superstitious side of her nature. The white face of her wronged mistress seemed to call for vengeance, while something whispered to Jane that the vengeance would come, and in a terrible form.

But as she drew near to Margaret her terror grew less. Her experienced eye, as soon as she was sufficiently herself to look at the matter calmly, told her that this was not death, but only a kind of fainting-fit, produced probably by strong mental excitement. Her first feeling was one of intense relief—her second, of indignation against the unconscious cause of her alarm.

"A body would think," she muttered, "that she'd done it a purpose."

As she spoke she lifted the fainting lady—without much difficulty, for Margaret had grown very thin, and Jane's physical strength was extraordinary—and laid her on the bed in the next room. Then with some roughness she proceeded to use the various remedies—splashed water in unnecessary quantities into her mistress's face, and rubbed Margaret's soft palms with her bony fingers.

It was a rough and ready mode of proceeding, but it proved effectual. Margaret opened her eyes and looked round her, perfectly bewildered at her position. Jane Rodgers's hard face was the first object that met her gaze; feeling round her, she discovered that water was dripping from her face and hair.

She tried to rise. "Where am I?" she said faintly.

"Lie still," replied Jane authoritatively, holding her down with that vice-like grasp which is so irritating to the weak. "You've been and fainted," she continued sullenly—"Goodness knows for why—and frightening the very breath out of my body; but if this kind of thing is to go on, you must find some other place, or else get a woman in. I've too much to do in the house to be giving *my* time continual to nurse-tending."

The rude speech was almost lost upon Margaret, for memory was awaking from its sleep; the events of the day were returning gradually to her mind. "Yes," she said slowly; "I remember now. I suppose I fainted." Then rising to a sitting posture she fixed her large eyes on her servant's face.

The face was so white in its strange chiselled beauty, the eyes were so wild and mournful, that for the moment Jane's superstitious fears returned.

"Lor!" she said hastily, "*don't* look at a body like that, there's a dear. Come—Miss Laura 'll come back, never you fear. Children isn't lost in that way."

"Where *is* Miss Laura gone?" Margaret's voice was very low, her eyes were still fixed on her servant's face.

Jane placed the candle on the table and turned aside to pull down the window-blind and arrange the curtains. "I'll tell you all about it," she said soothingly, "if you'll lie down quiet. Miss Laura, she came in alone, and I give her her dinner; after dinner she sits down with her picture-book. Presently a gentleman came in at the garden-gate; I, as it might be in the kitchen, see Miss Laura, from the window, a running out, quite pleased like to meet him. Them two go into the sitting-room, and then Miss Laura, she come running down into the kitchen. 'Jane,' she says, 'my hat, quick; it's my papa, and we're going to meet mamma on the sands.' Miss Laura, as your orders is, mustn't never be contradicted, so I get her hat, and off they go together through the garden-gate. I see them walk along the sands, and thinks I to myself, 'I'll get tea ready, for they'll find missis, and all come in together.' So now you know as much as I do, for Miss Laura ain't come back all the afternoon."

As Jane spoke she turned her face, which expressed nothing but conscious virtue, to her mistress. Margaret was writhing on the bed as if she had been suffering from some keen physical pain.

"What was he like—this gentleman who came in I mean?" she asked in a low, weak voice. A last hope, a very faint one, was struggling with her misery.

"Difficult to say *ex*act," replied Jane, rather hesitatingly; then, as though repeating a lesson, "He be tall, as far as I remember, and good-looking, dark hair and whiskers, and eyes like Miss Laura's own."

It was all Margaret wanted to know. "Thank you, Jane," she replied quietly, "you may go now. Don't be alarmed," she continued, half smiling, as the woman hesitated on the threshold, "I shall not faint again."

"But you'll take something," said Jane, a certain feeling of compunction pricking the small remnant of a heart she still possessed; "come, have a glass of wine, like a dear."

"You may bring a glass and put it down by the bedside," she replied, so calmly that Jane went away quite bewildered and a little frightened still. "There," when she returned with the glass, "that will do; thank you. Now good-night."

When Jane had left her Margaret looked round, and her worst enemy would have felt a pang of remorse could he have noted the white, haggard desolation which that day's suffering had left upon her face. Holding by the bed-post for support, she raised herself and felt along by the bits of furniture till she came to Laura's little cot. There she paused. Kneeling down beside it, she kissed the pillow where the child's head had rested only the night before.

"My Laura," she murmured faintly, "my child—mine—

mine;" and then again, "His, not mine—mine no longer. God forgive me! I did not prize my treasure, and now it is taken from me for ever."

The little pillow was clasped to the breast of the bereaved mother as if it had been her child, for she scarcely knew what she was doing; that torpor of brain had seized her once more. Sinking to the ground, she rocked it to and fro in her arms, murmuring over it soft words of endearment.

And thus at last sleep, the nursing-mother of the wretched, found Margaret Grey. Well for her that it came when it did, for her mind could scarcely have borne at this time a more continued pressure. With her cheek resting on the pillow, which was wet with her abundant tears, and her back against the iron supports of her child's bed, Margaret forgot all her sorrow for the time in the arms of "Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep."

CHAPTER V.

THE LAWYER IN HIS OWN DOMAIN.

Overreach. 'Tis a rich man's pride! there having ever been
More than a feud, a strange antipathy,
Between us and true gentry.

Mr. Robinson had not forgotten Mrs. Grey, nor the little business which she had confided to him. With his usual tact and judgment he had secured his bird, the bird in this case being their common debtor. Like a clap of thunder, one fine morning the news reached this worthy that his account had been attached at the bank by the man who for some time had acted as his solicitor.

He was on his knees at once with abject entreaties, and Mr. Robinson, who was too Christian-hearted to wish to crush a fellow-creature, consented to act for him again, thereby in a measure restoring his credit, but only on one condition—that he should receive without delay the amount owing for his somewhat exorbitant lawyer's bill.

"But what am I to do, my good sir?" faltered the man; "all I possess is in your hands."

"And nothing much to boast about," replied the lawyer quietly; "but, sir, you will not presume to tell me that all you possess is in the hands of your banker? Pray reflect a moment. In the dealings between man and man, especially when they hold the relation of solicitor and client—a relation which I trust will be resumed between us when this matter is adjusted—there must be frankness, honesty. Come now"—he spoke jovially—"about that fine house of furniture?"

"My wife's, I assure you—bought with her money."

The lawyer's face fell perceptibly: "Settled then?"

"Not precisely, but the same thing; you see it was in fact a wedding-present from her father, a man in an excellent position, Mr. Robinson."

"Ah!" Mr. Robinson showed his teeth. "Law doesn't recognize sentiment, my dear sir—a pity, clearly, but so it is. The furniture is yours to dispose of as you will."

The unfortunate man first flushed, then turned pale. "And what has this to do with it?" he asked rather angrily.

The lawyer raised his hand: "Calmly, calmly. These matters should be looked in the face, sir—looked in the face. I only speak in your own interest: that little balance at the bank—very little indeed, I think—is all you have to look to if you wish to set up again. I (remember, sir, I too have a wife and children) must be firm in this matter. A bill of sale on this furniture of yours—or of your wife's, if you will—can be given to me as security; I will then release your account and set you on your feet again. What do you say?"

"If it must be, it must be," replied the man with something between a groan and a sneer.

Mrs. Grey's name, or that unfortunate mortgage of the interest on which not a penny had been seen for the last year, was not, as it will be noticed, mentioned between them. One allusion only was made to it.

"We'll allow you to make a start," said Mr. Robinson benevolently, "and after that it will be time enough to look into those other little matters that are between us still."

"Those other little matters!" The bare mention of them made the unfortunate wince, especially when the reference was made to the accompaniment of Mr. Robinson's hard smile and cold, blue-steel gaze; but he hoped on, as men in his position will hope, for a stroke of luck, a good speculation, something to raise his status in the monetary world.

He drew on his gloves hurriedly: "Yes, yes, my good friend, as you so kindly say, time enough; I must feel my legs before I disburse, and to pay up at present would be out-and-out ruin. In the mean time *you* may rely upon me. My affairs are in your hands."

So Mr. Robinson felt, and he rubbed his hands pleasantly. The consciousness of power was always agreeable to him. "I hope so, I hope so," he replied briskly. "Let me assure you, sir, that I shall watch you narrowly In my client's interests you know it is incumbent on me to be firm."

"But in your own firmer," muttered the man between his teeth as he went down stairs. "What precious humbugs these lawyers are! If I were only out of this one's hands!"

He clenched his fist and his brows contracted. That "bill of sale" was rankling in his mind, but moaning could not mend matters, and he was by no means the only one whom Mr. Robinson held that day, writhing but submissive, under his cunning hand.

He smiled when the door closed behind his client. This man's tastefully-decorated house had often awakened in the lawyer's mind not envy, malice, guile and all uncharitableness, for Mr. Robinson was a consistent man, but a certain keen admiration that perhaps, looking at it in the light of the sequel, might have passed very well for their counterfeit.

The furniture he had admired was in his power; this made the lawyer smile, but the smile passed into a business frown as a timid rap at the door announced the approach of one of his clerks.

He was bringing in the letters from the last post, and presenting those that had been written for the signature of the head of the firm. Mr. Robinson proceeded slowly to inspect his letters, the young man standing near him in a quietly respectful attitude.

"Mr. Moon been written to?" he inquired curtly.

"Yes, sir."

"And Mrs. Grey?"

"A letter from her, sir, on the table."

"Right!—wait a moment."

Mr. Robinson did everything in a quiet, business-like way He proceeded with great deliberation to open his letters one by one, using a paper-cutter for the purpose, until he came to the one in question.

"Have you got Mrs. Grey's letter there? Ah!" He tore it across, and threw the pieces into the waste-paper basket at his side. "Tell Wilson I will write myself—something wrong there. What are you waiting for? Do you want anything?"

"Only to say, sir, that you promised—that is, I mean—"

"Say what you mean—can't you?—and don't stand there wasting my time and your own."

The young fellow's features twitched nervously. He was of good birth and breeding, though so poor as to accept, and accept thankfully, the miserable pittance of a lawyer's clerk.

"I have been with you three years, sir," he said with some dignity; "you promised my mother that if I gave you satisfaction you would give me my articles. My mother has requested me to ask you whether this promise is to be fulfilled. My poor father—"

The young man spoke easily now; he was warming to his theme. His poor father had made Mr. Robinson's fortunes.

As a man of the world he had taken him up, introduced him to his circle, a large one and influential, and by his recommendations gained for him clients innumerable.

He was dead, and before his death, by an unfortunate series of speculations, had ruined his family. His sons had been trained at school and college, they were at home in the hunting-field, they excelled in all kinds of manly sports, their pleasant accomplishments and gentlemanly ease made them welcome in every society, but as men of business they were practically useless.

Mr. Robinson had been accustomed, only when their father's back was turned, to sneer at them for fine gentlemen. Nothing aroused his jealous ire so much as the sight of what he was pleased to call a fine gentleman, for Mr. Robinson had a certain innate consciousness which more of his class possess than we generally imagine. It was this: he knew that in the world he might do his own will, coin money by the handlu' (for in his temperament and constitution were all the elements of success), become rich, powerful, sought out: *one* distinction he could never reach. The quiet ease, the graceful nonchalance, the tone of high breeding which a fine gentleman possesses, as it were, by instinct, was and would always remain beyond him. And therefore he professed to despise the class.

"Tush! tush!" he said, breaking short the young man's allusion to him who had been his friend in those days when he, the great Mr. Robinson, had been climbing painfully; "don't you attempt to bring home tales to me or I'll make short work with you. There shall be no snivelling here. Mind you, it is only respect for your father's memory that induces me to keep you at all. You're not worth your salt. As to giving you your articles, what good do you suppose that would do you? Be off! mind your work, and let me have no more of such whining."

James Robinson was enjoying himself. His blue-gray eyes flashed and a smile curled his lips. To put down a fine gentleman was the finest piece of fun in the world, but this time he had gone too far. Suddenly the boy changed; manhood and manly purposes seemed to look out from his eyes, the obsequious attitude had gone, he approached his master, and dared to look him fully and fearlessly in the face: "Then, Mr. Robinson, hear me. I will sit down no more to your desk; I will bear your insolence no longer. My mother and I believed you had offered me a situation out of kindness and gratitude; yes—glare at me if you will; I repeat it—gratitude to my father's memory. We thought your intentions honest, and the peculiar ungentlemanliness of your conduct to be attributed only to your want of good breeding. I may tell you that yesterday I was offered, and offered pressingly, what you refuse so insultingly to-day, and by a far better and older firm than yours. I thought I owed you a certain duty, and would not accept it until I had put you in mind of your promise. Now I have heard you, and once and for ever I shake myself free of you, only humiliated that for three long years I should have associated daily with so base and low a nature."

He turned on his heel, he was gone, leaving Mr. Robinson in a white heat of rage and indignation. He had been hearing home-truths for once, and, what was still worse, hearing them in his own domain, the kingdom he had been accustomed to rule with a rod of iron. For a moment he was utterly taken aback, breathless, but lest the contagion should spread self-control and swift action were necessary.

"Let him go, the insolent young beggar!" he muttered; then turning he rang his bell. The office-boy appeared: "Send Mr. Wilson here." There was a notable change in his voice; the bully had gone from it, preparation was being made for the impressive chapel tone.

Mr. Wilson, the head-clerk of the firm, found his chief rather pale and exhausted, leaning back in his chair.

"Sit down, Wilson," he said with unusual urbanity; "I must have a few words with you."

The flattered Wilson obeyed.

"You noticed, I dare say," he continued after a pause, "that young McArthur went out in something of a hurry just now?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am sorry to say that I have been obliged to perform a very painful duty. I will not enter into details. My deep respect for the unfortunate youth's family, and especially the memory of his father—a true Christian, Wilson, one who sleeps in peace—makes me wish that as far as possible this should be kept a profound secret. Of course I have dismissed McArthur. It was a duty, and *from* duty, however painful, the Christian never shrinks." Mr. Robinson paused to draw his white handkerchief over his brow. The force of habit is strong. He imagined himself for the moment on the platform of a gospel-hall. "If he had been my own son"—Mr. Robinson's face expressed proud consciousness that a Robinson could never demean himself in so mysterious a way—"if he had been my own son I could not have felt the matter more keenly; nor indeed could I have acted differently; the position I hold enforces upon me a certain responsibility. But this is all to no purpose—a few words drawn from me, as I might say, by excess of feeling on this painful occasion. What I particularly wished to say to you, Wilson, is this: it is my desire that no questions shall be asked in the house about this unfortunate boy or his sudden dismissal. You may say, if you like, that he was discontented, tired of the monotony of office-life—anything; my only wish is that he should be shielded from exposure. I would give him a chance of buckling to once more. Heaven grant, if only for his poor mother's sake, that he may see the error of his ways! But we are wasting time over this unhappy youth. Well, human nature *is* human nature, and my feelings toward him were those of a father. Ah! I remember one thing more. It is my special wish that none of my clerks shall have intercourse of any kind with young McArthur. You will understand me, Wilson. The young man is indignant at discovery —not as yet, I fear, truly penitent. He may wish to injure the firm. We must be on our guard."

Mr. Wilson was clever as a man of business, but he did not possess much penetration. He cherished a blind admiration for his chief, and was quite ready to look upon his every statement as gospel. On this occasion he did not even stop to consider how very vague and guarded was all that Mr Robinson had said about the young man he professed to have dismissed; he was satisfied in his own mind that something dark lay behind these vague phrases, and was ready to help his chief to neutralize the mischief.

"All right, sir," he replied quietly; "I will see to the young fellows, but I scarcely think Mr. McArthur will venture to show his face here. A pity, too—a fine young man, and tolerably smart, his bringing-up considered."

"Ah! there it is," replied Mr. Robinson, with unction. "Pride, Wilson, pride, the crying sin of our fallen nature. His bringing-up was his ruin. But enough about him. Anything particular for me to-morrow?"

"No, sir; we can manage very well. You think of going into the country?"

"On business. Mrs. Grey is in some new trouble. Unfortunate woman! I suppose I had better see after the matter myself. I verily believe she has no friend in the wide world but me. Queer person, too—can't quite make her out. Send up the rest of the letters, Wilson, and if there should be anything of importance, telegraph to this address. I may probably be two or three days away."

Wilson retired, and Mr. Robinson proceeded to inspect the time tables of the Great Northern. A little change in the early summer weather would do him a world of good, and Mrs. Grey's business could easily be prolonged.

Before the letters came in for signature he had decided on an early-morning train, and was already enjoying by anticipation the luxury of a series of drives along the coast.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. ROBINSON PROMISES TO DO HIS BEST.

> But all was false and hollow; though his tongue
> Dropp'd manna, and could make the worse appear
> The better reason, to perplex and dash
> Maturest counsels.

"LET us look at the matter in this light, Mrs. Grey." The speaker was Mr. Robinson, and his tone was particularly lively. "Your husband has cause, fancied or real—for the sake of argument we must put that part of the question aside—your husband, we shall say, has cause of complaint against you. He has ceased to consider you a fit guardian for his daughter after the first unconsciousness of childhood. What ought to be his method of proceeding in such a case? Why, clearly this. He should advertise you, through your solicitor, of his desire, and allow him to negotiate between you. Had he done so, my advice no doubt would have been of some service. I should have suggested that Miss Laura should be placed, for the time being, in some educational establishment where both parents could have had access to her, even, if Mr. Grey had insisted upon this point, under certain restrictions on your side."

Mr. Robinson paused at this point as if for consideration. Mrs. Grey shivered slightly, and drew her shawl more closely round her shoulders. It was a beautiful July day. The sun was shining brightly, the birds were singing, there was the warm breath of summer upon everything, but Margaret was like one stricken with a chill. Her face was pale and haggard, her dark mournful eyes were sunken, her long white fingers, almost transparent, twitched nervously from time to time.

"But Mr. Grey has *not* acted in this way," she said with some fretfulness in her tone.

"Patience, my dear lady," he answered in the lively manner with which he had entered upon the subject; "we are coming to that point presently. Affliction, you know, cometh not forth of the dust. Job suffered grievously, but held fast his integrity. In *this* world tribulation; your trials are sent; you must ask for the grace of patience, that you may be enabled to bear them worthily. But to return. The first point we should consider is this: Who was actually the person that removed your daughter from your care? the second, How and in what method was such removal accomplished? In this you must help me. Will you try and make a concise statement of the events of the day in question—what your occupations were, how your child came to be alone—giving me also the grounds of your suspicion that Mr. Grey is a party to the kidnapping of his child?—Rather amusing, by the bye, when one comes to think of it—a father running away with his own daughter." Mr. Robinson laughed pleasantly at his own joke, which did not seem to impress his companion so agreeably.

Margaret rose from her chair impatiently, rang the bell and walked to the door of the room: "I shall send you the servant, Mr. Robinson; she was the only person in the house when my daughter was taken away."

She went out into the garden and stood under the trees. The sun was falling on her hair, the soft wind swept it back from her brow, but her pale lips quivered, and from her eyes came no responsive gladness to meet the beauty of the summer morning. She was wondering why she had sent for this man, why she had laid bare her bleeding heart. Would it not have been better, a thousand times better, to have hidden this last anguish as she had hidden the others—to have suffered and wept in silence? For the lawyer's keen criticism and unsparing common sense had been like a kind of analysis of her torture—had added to her sorrow the agony of undeserved humiliation. Her husband *had* insulted her. This was the bitterest drop in her cup of anguish, and this Mr.

Robinson, a representative of the world, which is given to harsh judgment of the weak, had not failed to bring clearly before her mind. It was bitterly hard to be borne.

She thought, and bowed her head upon her breast with a sigh that seemed to drain the life-blood from her heart. How was it that everything grated upon her, wounded her? What had she expected, then? she asked herself. That this man, a man of business, with interests and affections of his own, would enter tenderly and religiously into the sanctuary of her grief, would touch her wound lightly, would bring help without adding suffering? Was it not folly, madness? But she would cast this morbid sentimentality aside; Heaven would grant her in time the hardness she needed.

She sat down on a seat under the tree. She could see through the parlor-window that Jane was taking full advantage of her position. She was interviewing the lawyer to some effect, talking volubly and illustrating her statement with expressive gestures.

Margaret could not help smiling faintly. As a calmer mood returned she felt she had put herself in a somewhat ridiculous position. She returned to the house, breaking in upon a florid account of Jane's terror on the night following Laura's disappearance. "That's quite enough, Jane," she said, some of her old dignity in her voice and manner; "you may go down stairs now."

The landlady by no means approved of the interruption. She had been giving the lawyer her statement, in keen and hungry expectation of his. He would probably, she thought, unfold to her some of the mysteries that had been perplexing her, and now she was summarily dismissed.

There was some malignity in the glance she cast upon her mistress, but Margaret was too much engrossed in the business upon which she was bent to take the slightest notice of her. Jane retired—as far as the next room, that is to say, hoping some fragments of the conversation would reach her.

She was disappointed. Mrs. Grey opened the French window and led her solicitor into the garden.

"That's a most sensible woman," Mr. Robinson said when they had seated themselves outside; "she has a good head and evidently a good heart; her feeling for you is quite remarkable. You see, Mrs. Grey, the goodness of Providence?—friends raised up for the friendless. We are all apt to overlook our mercies and over-estimate our trials. You don't agree? Ah! one day I trust you will come round to my opinion. But to business. Will you be kind enough to tell me what you wish me to do in this matter?"

"I thought I had explained it already, Mr. Robinson." Mrs. Grey looked tired and spoke with a certain languor. "I do not wish to dispute my husband's will. If it is his desire to remove my daughter from my care altogether, I submit. I wish simply to communicate with him on my own account, and for this reason I want you to find out his address for me. It cannot surely be a very difficult matter. These affairs, I know, are sometimes expensive. I desire that no expense shall be spared. Let any capital I may still possess be sold out and used. I believe I have this power. I have some jewelry too; I had wished to keep it, but that desire has gone entirely." She drew off two or three rings, one of diamonds and emeralds apparently very valuable, and placed a casket in his hands, saying as she did so, "Do what is to be done as quickly as possible; there is no time to lose." Her cheek flushed painfully, and she pressed her hand to her side.

Mr. Robinson had taken the jewelry with some empressement. He looked at it curiously: "I shall have these trifles valued on my return, Mrs. Grey. We shall hope to have no occasion for the use of them. Of course these inquiries, especially when time is a matter of such moment, cost something, and capital can scarcely be realized at so short a notice. However, set your mind at rest: everything that lies in human power to accomplish shall be done; the result we must leave to higher hands than ours. And, by the bye, as we *are* on the subject of business, you will be glad to hear that your debtor the mortgagee—you will remember if you cast your mind back to our last interview—is completely in my power. I shall certainly realize the greater part of the sum lent. Do you follow me, Mrs. Grey?" for Margaret's attention seemed to flag. She had forgotten the mortgage, the debt, the threatened poverty, for her whole force of mind was centred on the one anxiety—to find out her husband, to appeal to his memories of the past, to persuade him at least to see her; and that fainting-fit with the succeeding weakness had frightened her, making her feel that possibly her time on earth might be short.

"Yes," she said absently; "but, Mr. Robinson, tell me how soon you will be likely to hear of Mr. Grey?"

"Impossible to say accurately, my dear lady, and it is quite against my principles to encourage false hope. If I were a doctor, I should frankly tell my patients of their danger, relying on a higher power than mine to temper the wind and prepare the mind of my patient for the shock, though, indeed, if we all lived in a state of preparation, the approach of death would be little or no shock—shuffling off the mortal coil, going home. But to return: I was saying, I think, that I make it a rule never to encourage false hopes. I have lost clients by it, Mrs. Grey; you would really be amazed at the pertinacity of some folks. It is in this way: A man comes to me. 'Shall I succeed if I go to law in this matter?' he asks. If hopeless, I answer candidly, No. Sometimes my client will insist upon my taking up the business. If not against the dictum of my conscience—an article, by the bye, which we lawyers are not supposed to possess—I submit and do my best, leaving the result. Sometimes he will go off to a more unscrupulous practitioner. It matters very little. What, after all, is so much worth having as the answer of a good conscience?"

Mrs. Grey sighed. This torrent of words wearied her beyond measure. "You have not answered my question, Mr. Robinson," she said; "under favorable circumstances how long would such an inquiry take?"

"And who is to guarantee us favorable circumstances?" replied the lawyer, smiling pleasantly. "My dear lady, I must beg you to be patient. We *may* fail absolutely. Mind you, I do not mean to assert that I apprehend we *shall* fail. Come! a promise. As soon as ever I receive intelligence of *any* kind I will transmit it to you by telegraph. Will that satisfy you?"

"I suppose it *should*," she replied sadly, but there was a feeling of dissatisfaction at her heart that belied her words.

She had not quite the same confidence in Mr. Robinson as she had once had.

In the light of that fever of anxiety which consumed her his trite commonplaces, his rapidly-given assurances looked hollow and vague. She felt as if another standing-point were being cut ruthlessly from under her feet, and yet what could she do? She had no friend, no hope in the wide world, but this man.

She looked up at him, fixing on his rather hard face her mournful eyes, in which unshed tears were swimming. "Mr. Robinson," she said, "you are a Christian man. I can trust you; you will do your very best for me."

He answered by a frank smile and a cordial hand-grip: "You are a little upset, Mrs. Grey, or I should be apt to resent the want of confidence which those words imply. Of course you can rely on me. Now good-bye: I must be off to my wife. I left her at the hotel here, close at hand. She came along with me merely for the trip, and is particularly anxious for a drive before her return; but duty first, pleasure afterward, I told her."

"Good-bye," said Mrs. Grey.

She was reassured once more, ready to blame herself for the momentary distrust.

Mr. Robinson went away with a light swinging step and a cheerful smile. He was no villain, at least in his own eyes, for his small villainies were disguised under such pleasing names that he really thought himself a very good man.

"Poor woman!" he said to himself as he walked along, "what an absurd notion! She'll never find that husband of hers; and if she did, where would be the use?"

And all this meant, "I shall take no particular pains to find him, and certainly not yet; it might be awkward."

Thought is strange in its working. There is the surface action, employed on that which holds it for the moment—the book, the work, the occupation; that which flows under, memory of what has just passed, planning for something in the new future; and often, beneath both these, a deeper undercurrent, its existence scarcely acknowledged even to the mind itself.

It was in this undercurrent that James Robinson hid thoughts which would not bear the light, and thus to the world, to his family, and even to himself, he continued to be an upright and strictly honorable man.

It was a dangerous game. Thought has a volcanic tendency. It is apt to force its way upward, to cleave suddenly the superincumbent strata that holds it from the surface.

Many such a man as James Robinson, quiet, respectable and respected, even to all appearance devout, has been astonished by waking up some fine morning and finding himself a villain.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

> Friend of my heart! away with care,
> And sing and dance and laugh.

On the day succeeding that of the interview between Margaret and her solicitor, Arthur Forrest was preparing in his chambers for a short absence from town. The memorable conversation with his cousin had taken place on the previous afternoon. Since then he had made all needful arrangements, and was to start by the afternoon mail for York. He was busy about his room, his portmanteau open before him, picking out the few necessaries he would require.

He looked rather different from the moonstruck individual who had so sorely tried his good little cousin's patience only a few hours before, for determination and action have a certain power. They can brace the nerves and give courage to the spirit. There was fresh, buoyant life in young Arthur's face; there was light in his eyes; there was healthy activity in his movements.

He was whistling lightly over his task and the pleasing meditations induced, when he was interrupted by a knock at the door. The knock was followed by the appearance on the threshold of a young man probably of about his own age, only that the pallor of his face and a general delicacy of appearance made him seem younger.

Arthur leapt over the portmanteau, upset in his transit two or three chairs laden with linen and clothing of various kinds, and grasping the new-comer warmly by the hand drew him into the room:

"Why, Mac, old boy! who would have thought of seeing you, and in the middle of the day, too? Has your old tyrant played the truant, or have discipline and responsibility run wild in his establishment?"

The young man laughed: "Neither. But the fact is this —I have grown tired of my master at last; and yesterday—or the day before it must have been—I told him a few wholesome truths and turned my back on the firm, leaving my last few pounds of salary in his hands as a parting gift."

Arthur had been gathering some of his shirts together. He dropped them suddenly and gave a rapturous bound: "At last! You don't surely mean to say so? All my prophecies come true. Bravo, old fellow! I congratulate you heartily. But come, I am all impatience. I must have a full, true and particular account of the whole. What was the last drop? How did you resent its introduction? For, upon my word, Mac, you took him so patiently that I began to fear your old spirit had gone. I longed at times to show all those muffs in that confounded hole of an office what you could do when the blood was up. But why don't you say something?"

"Because, old fellow, you won't let a man get in a word edgeways. And then, you see, my memory's short. I was never good at learning by heart, especially my own efforts at composition. He spoke insultingly when I asked him to keep his word to my mother and give me my articles. In reply I let him know, in good strong English, what I thought of him generally and of his present conduct in particular. Finally, I left his place in a fine rage, I can assure you. I imagine Robinson was ditto, but his after-thoughts he didn't reveal. There! will that satisfy you?"

Arthur gave a long whistle: "Spoke insultingly, did he? I wonder who that fellow thinks himself? Well, I needn't enter into particulars; you're well aware of my sentiments. And now, old man, what's to be the next step?"

"Perplexing," replied young McArthur, knitting his brows. "There's *your* man of business—Golding. You heard of the kind offer he made me the other day. I was scarcely, as I thought, in a position to accept it. I wish to Goodness I had, though; my cutting remarks would have had double force. By the bye, Arthur, that was prompted by you, I imagine. Do you think he would renew it?"

"Not the faintest doubt in the world. Golding is an excellent old fellow, and honester, I sincerely believe, than the ordinary race of lawyers. Then, don't you see, it would scarcely suit his book to break with me just now. I shall be of age in a few weeks, and he takes a fatherly interest in my affairs. Joking apart, though, I believe he does. It's a better firm altogether than Robinson's. But come, I was just off to lunch. Take a little something with me and we can talk it over by the way. Then, if you like, I shall have time to go with you as far as Golding's. I know your mind will be easier when this matter is settled. Now, don't be a humbug. I can see in your face that you have not lunched, and for once in the way you are, like myself, an idle man."

McArthur smiled, and pointed to the chairs and table.

"But what about all this? Do you intend to leave it so? And—you're off somewhere?"

"Only to York on a little matter of business," replied Arthur, who had turned to the mirror, and was occupying himself in imparting a certain air of fascination to the set of his budding moustache. "I must get the old woman here—a motherly body in her way, and useful when a fellow can get out of reach of her tongue—to finish for me. Yes, that's decidedly the best plan. Come along, Mac! If my coming of age is worthy of being made a festival, certainly your breaking loose from that rascal—whose whining is enough to sicken the healthiest person—is trebly so. We must have a bottle of champagne and a general jollification on the strength of it; then we can go to Golding's together, and after that I shall still have time to catch the afternoon mail."

"I didn't know you had friends in York."

"Did I *say* I had friends there?"

"No, but what can *your* business be? I always thought it consisted in carrying out and bringing to a successful end a rather laborious system of amusement."

"Come, Mac, don't be severe. I'm turning over a new leaf, and am fast becoming a most useful member of society

I have already two pictures, a score of elaborate novels, a series of scientific works and books of travel innumerable in my eye."

"As your own performance or your neighbor's?"

"My own, of course. Do you mean to be insulting, Mac, or have you fallen so low as to imagine a solicitor's office the *only* path to fame? But don't apologize, old fellow; I forgive you in consideration of a certain derangement of brain, the result, no doubt, of your late experiences."

"What have *you* been doing to yourself, Forrest?" The young man looked at his friend with some curiosity. Arthur's face was flushed and his eyes were beaming with excitement. "Your spirits have been at rather a low ebb whenever I have had the opportunity of seeing you lately; now they are perfectly exuberant. I think there must be something more in this visit to York than is quite apparent to the casual observer. Blushing, too! Why, old fellow, I thought your blushing days were over long ago, like mine."

Arthur turned away in some impatience: "Don't be absurd, Mac, or I shall certainly be cross, and at present I feel generally genial—sympathetic, as I shall remark in my first novel, with the sweet influences of the balmy breezes. By the bye, that would be rather neat, wouldn't it?"

"Uncommonly. You're improving, old fellow. Heigh-ho! *my* sentimental days are gone by. Nothing like office-life for rubbing off that kind of bloom. Do you remember the girls' school, and my deep indignation when you would insist upon singing about 'the merry little maiden of sweet sixteen'?"

"An awfully good song, by the bye," put in Arthur.

His friend did not notice the interruption. "I am not so sure, after all," he said thoughtfully, "that hard work is not the best thing at our age. Everybody could not pass as you have done through the temptations of an idle youth."

Arthur laughed, but he looked at his companion affectionately: "Come, come, Mac, that kind of thing won't quite fit in, you know—philosophy and compliment in one breath. But here we are. Now, if you're not hungry I am; so a truce to reflections. They shall come, if you still feel anxious for them, in the shape of dessert."

The young men sat down to dinner together, and Arthur took care it should be a particularly good one. He and McArthur had been chums at Eton, and although the very different circumstances of their after-life had necessarily thrown them apart, they had still kept up their friendship in a certain spasmodic way.

It had been broken at times by a slight want of consideration on the one side, and a certain pride, the growth of poverty, on the other; but real mutual affection and respect had been strong enough to heal the different little breaks, and the young men had reached the point of understanding each other, and of making mutual allowance for the weaknesses engendered by circumstances.

They did not often meet, for their lives were very differently spent, and McArthur was wise enough to know that for him to enter at all into his friend's pursuits or to frequent his circle would be sheer folly. This it was that occasionally hurt and fretted Arthur. But a meeting such as that of this day was a source of real pleasure to both.

During the short hour everything life held of weariness and discontent was forgotten. They rattled on as if they had been still school-boys, with no present care to oppress their lives and a brilliant future before them.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INDIAN SCARF.

A man in love sees wonders.

A FEW hours later, and Arthur Forrest was lodged for the night in an hotel which looked out upon one of the quaint, old-fashioned streets in the ancient city of York.

The journey had by no means diminished his excitement. He was literally aflame with the fever of anxiety and suspense that consumed him, for this was his first young dream, and it mastered him with an absoluteness which only that first in the series that often diversifies the adolescence of humanity, male and female, can possess.

Afterward we know what to expect; then everything is new, wonderful, incomprehensible—the sweet waking up to a heavenly mystery. And it comes generally at a time when life is at its fullest; when imagination, passion, sentiment reign in the soul with undisputed sway; when the heart is uncontaminated—at least partially so—by the influences which those to whom youth's Eden is a forgotten land delight to throw round the inexperienced, giving them lessons, they would say, in the great art of living—lessons, alas! which the young are only too ready to receive and put into practice.

Arthur was in this first ecstatic stage. No doubt to the experienced onlooker it might appear highly ridiculous; to himself it was intensely real. His very existence seemed to have changed in the dazzling glamour that the treacherous little god had cast over his vision. He saw all his past, his present, his future in relation to this *one* thing—his chances of success with the fair Margaret.

It was late when he reached York—too late for him to think of going farther that night.

He ordered a private sitting-room, for no particular reason but the necessity he felt for quiet meditation, that he might unravel the tormenting problems of the how, the why and the wherefore which, in spite of Adèle's encouraging assurance, had begun to embarrass him sorely. How should he present himself to Mrs. Grey? What could he give as a reason for having left London to seek her out? In what light would she look upon his intrusion? These thoughts perplexed him as far into the night he paced the floor of his sitting-room, resting himself by the continual movement, but sorely interfering with the rest of the gentleman who occupied the room below his. He had taken many turns up and down before any light had dawned upon his mind, and in final despair he was about to retire to his bedroom and try the effect of darkness, when suddenly his eyes fell on something that had hitherto escaped them. It was an Indian scarf of great brilliancy which had been left lying on a small low chair in one of the corners of the room.

It brought a certain memory to Arthur's mind. He took it up, handling it with reverential tenderness. Where had he seen it before? Why did the sight of it affect him so strangely? He looked at it, he touched it; he laid it down and retiring to some distance examined it again. Then by degrees the sought-for link returned. The pictures, the crimson-covered seat, the pale woman, her shabby dress, and in striking contrast with it, the costly fabric on her shoulders. It was a coincidence, he said to himself—a very strange one—that here, when he was seeking Margaret, he should find the fac-simile of what she had worn on the occasion of their first meeting. Could it be the same—hers, left behind her? If so, here was an opening thrown by kind Fate into his lap.

The silken scarf should be his excuse; with it he would present himself to Mrs. Grey. It was valuable in itself, and she had evidently had some other reason besides its intrinsic worth for prizing it. She would be grateful for its preservation, and the bearer of her treasure would have a certain claim on her consideration.

Arthur determined to discover the history of the scarf on the next day, and if he should find it at all fit in with his ideas to take it back to its owner in triumph. For that night it was too late to do anything. He looked despairingly at the little French clock over the chimney-piece. It was two o'clock A. M., and an absolute silence reigned in the house.

But he possessed the sanguine nature of youth. He could not doubt that he had found a solution to the problem which had been agitating his mind. His anxieties being thus partially set at rest, he began to feel tired. With the silk scarf close to his hand he fell asleep; its colors mingled in confusion inextricable with all his dreams; it was the first object that met his gaze on the following morning.

He felt inclined to ring at once and make inquiries, but on second thought he decided that to take such a step would scarcely be wise. Young men in Arthur Forrest's position are keenly susceptible to ridicule. Undue anxiety might possibly seem suspicious. He controlled himself so far as to dress, to walk into his sitting-room, and to restore the scarf to the place it had occupied on the previous evening; then he rang for breakfast.

While the waiter was busy about the table he looked across the room as though for the first time the appearance of the scarf had struck him; then he took it up and examined it with apparent curiosity.

The waiter noticed his movement. "Ah! sir," he said briskly, "queer thing that."

"This scarf?" said Arthur carelessly; "it's certainly a very handsome one."

"I didn't mean the scarf, sir, but the tale, as one may say, that hangs on to it. It was left in this very room, identical, some four or five days ago, it may be, and I was the waiter as attended on the gentleman and little girl: a pretty creature she was too, with—"

"A gentleman and little girl?" broke in Arthur, forgetful of his prudence in his astonishment.

"Yes, sir; a gentleman not young, as one might say, to be the father of the little lady; and a lady she was, every inch of her, so pretty and well-behaved. It's *my* belief"—here the waiter lowered his voice and looked confidential —"there was somethink there over and above what met the eye, as one might say, sir." Then he disappeared to fetch the tea-pot.

Arthur was strangely interested in the little tale. "Stop," he said as the waiter was about to leave the room again; "what makes you think there was something mysterious about these people?"

The waiter smiled pleasantly. His loquaciousness was natural to him, but it had so often received rude checks that he had long ago been taught to control it. "It interests you, do it, sir?" he said cheerfully. "Well, now, to speak confidential, it's *my* belief as that gentleman wasn't father at all to that there little lady. She cried considerable that first night, for the chambermaid had been given somethink a little extra by the gentleman when he came into the hotel that every care might be taken of the little lady. And it was all on and off, so she says, the little lady a-crying and a-sobbing, and 'Oh, my mamma! I want my mamma; take me home.' Not much sleep had the little lady, or Jane either, for the matter of that. She has an uncommon soft heart, has Jane, and the little lady's sobs, she says, would have melted a heart of stone, let alone hers. Well, sir, as I was a-saying, it looked queer; but next morning the gentleman— He was a fine man, sir, he was, but had a look with him as if from foreign parts, which, as one may say, looked queer again, the little lady being very fair, with hair the color of that there frame, sir, all in curls over her face, and the loveliest complexion you ever see. What was I a-telling you of? Oh! The next morning the gentleman, he ordered breakfast, and he *and* the little lady had it in this very room as it might be now, sir, and certainly it wasn't no later, I being the waiter, Jane coming in now and again to see if little missy wanted for anythink. Seemed to us, Jane and me, that the gentleman said somethink in private, as it might be, to the little lady, for they seemed more friendlier-like, and after a bit little missy she write a letter and she look a deal cheerfuler, as one might say. The poor little dear hadn't so much—not as a change with her, sir." Again the waiter lowered his voice: "Looked queer, it did, and so says Jane to me in that very passage out there. Strange to tell, sir, the words is scarcely so much as out of our mouths before the bell rings violent-like, and Jane is sent out by that there gentleman, twenty pounds in her hand, and cart blank to get everythink ready made, and expense no object, as might be thought necessary for a young lady. It didn't take her long, I can answer for that. She come back with the things packed in a small portmanter, and her accounts made out all proper and business-like. It's Jane all over, sir. She do like to have everythink square and correct. 'But,' says the gentleman as grand as you please, 'I didn't want no accounts, and divide the change between yourself and the garçong;' by which he meant me, sir. It's the French way. They started that morning, and the little lady tell Jane, 'I shall come back very soon, I shall,' and then she puts her arms round her neck, 'Thank you,' she says in such a pretty way that Jane was quite upset like. And when she and the gentleman's gone there's this kind of shawl, as you have just remarked upon, sir, a-lying here in this room, and here it's been ever since. That's the story, sir, and I think you'll agree with me that it looks queer."

"It *is* strange," said Arthur very thoughtfully, "I can't understand it at all. Do you know," he continued, turning to the waiter, "I am almost sure I know the owner of this scarf.

It is, I see, a thing of some value, but if the proprietor of the hotel will put it in my charge for a time, I will leave a deposit to any amount he may think fit in its place, and restore it to him faithfully if I should prove to have been mistaken."

"I can't see for myself as how he can make any objection, sir; however, with your permission I must leave you now—there's my bell."

The waiter did not stay away longer than he could possibly help. Arthur's interest in the scarf seemed to him a new link in the story which had so powerfully excited the curiosity of various members of the establishment. On his return he found the young man still holding the scarf in his hand, with a thoughtful look on his face. But his patient receptivity of the waiter's good-humored chat seemed to have passed. "I wish to speak to the proprietor of the hotel," he said shortly.

"At once, sir?" asked the man in a disappointed tone. He was full to the brim of fresh particulars, hastily set in order during his journey from one breakfast-table to another.

"As soon as possible," was the reply, "I must leave York by an early train."

For Arthur Forrest could scarcely control his impatience. The waiter's dramatic little tale had awakened his interest. He had a kind of fancy that it was connected in some way with Margaret.

The proprietor found him pacing the room excitedly. He was politely surprised at the interest taken by the young gentleman in this small item of property left in his house, agreed with him that it was an article of some value, but refused to receive any deposit in exchange for it, with the exception of the young gentleman's card, and his assurance that they should hear whether or no the owner had been found, and finally presented his little bill, swollen in various items to fit in reasonably with the importance the young gentleman appeared to attach to the discovery he had made in the establishment. The landlord might have asked for double the amount; Arthur would have been perfectly unconscious. He was only anxious to get away with his treasure—to unearth the mystery it seemed to hide.

In all haste he sent for the friendly waiter, pressed half a sovereign into his willing hand, urging him to order a fly and get his traps together without delay.

In an incredibly short space of time the lumbering vehicle, as light as any that could be found in the ancient city, was bearing him through the narrow streets and overhanging gates to the station—a fresh stage on his journey to *her*.

CHAPTER IX.

ARTHUR ARRIVES AT MIDDLETHORPE.

Thank God, bless God, all ye who suffer not
More grief than ye can weep for.

Margaret Grey was sitting in her garden. It was a warm day. A faint haze, born of the vapor, paled the deep blue of the sky; not a breath of wind stirred the languid foliage of the trees; the flowers were bathed in light and color; through a gap in the trees came the glimmer of the sea, and faintly on the still air rose the murmur of lulling waves—scarcely waves, perhaps only movement, stir, the manifestation of ocean's ceaseless life. It was a day to rejoice in—a day when the pulses quicken and the heart is glad with unconscious, unreasoning gladness; when lovers look into one another's eyes and creep more closely together; when children laugh and sing, and even the dumb creatures seem to rejoice in being.

In *her* face was no sense of gladness. She sat under the trees, a book in her hand, a shawl wrapt closely round her shoulders.

Every particle of color had left her face, even her lips were pale. The golden coronal of hair with which Nature had endowed her seemed to throw a ghastly shade over her face. It looked unnatural, like the glory of youth when its life and gladness have gone by. Only her eyes retained their beauty, for through their mournful wistfulness, their sometimes wild eagerness, the beautiful soul still shone, and in the wreck of hope, of beauty, of life itself, that soul was learning, slowly and painfully, it is true, but learning still, the lesson that, consciously or unconsciously, all must learn,—submission to the Supreme Will first and above all; not the mild sentimental "Thy will be done" of which hymnists and sermon-coiners discourse so glibly, nor even that "grace of patience" which her solicitor had recommended her to seek as a panacea for all her ills, but a something far above and beyond these—a something that, perhaps, only those who have suffered keenly can ever know—the laying down of self-will altogether, the recognition, through sorrows and contradictions manifold, of a Divine Love

"Shaping the ends of life."

A book was in Margaret's hand, but she did not often look at it, at least not for long. There seemed to be a disturbing cause at work that prevented her from fixing her attention on anything but the absorbing anxiety which held her.

It was toward the afternoon of the long day, and she had been sitting there since early morning waiting and watching. From time to time she would take out her watch and consult it, and once she pressed her hand to her side, murmuring, "Patience, patience! My God, shall I ever learn it?"

And the song-birds flitted backward and forward over her head, and the sea smiled and the earth rejoiced. There was no answer to the cry of the lonely heart. Patience; yes, patience, poor stricken one! for "when night is darkest, then dawn is near." I wonder who thinks of it when the black darkness is closing around them? Certainly Margaret did not.

She was sitting in the back part of the little garden; from her position she could hear the door-bell and the click of the latch of the front gate, but she could not see those who came in or went out, and through that long day there had been no sound of outside life to break in upon her solitude. It had begun to sicken her as she sat under the trees looking out upon the sunshine.

There was a sound at last—the stopping of wheels at the garden-gate, the latch pushed back with something of impatience, a ring at the door-bell that echoed through the house.

Margaret leapt to her feet and tried to rush forward. It was surely that for which she had been looking—a telegram to tell her something had been done. He had promised to use all possible despatch.

Alas, poor Margaret! The "he" in question was at that moment exciting himself very little about her or her concerns. He was not very far from her. He could have been seen by any who had chosen to take the trouble of looking for him, seated on a strong little black pony, jogging along with great contentment—a conspicuous object on the yellow sands.

In moments of strong excitement physical power sometimes abandons us: perhaps it is that the spirit would master the body, and forgetting its bonds rush forward alone to meet the coming fate, and that then the weakness of its natural home draws it back to its humanity.

It was something like this Margaret experienced. She rose, she would have pressed forward. In an incredibly short time she would have had the message in her hands, but her limbs refused to bear her. She sank back on the garden-seat, compelled, whether she would or no, to wait—to wait.

The delay was not long, but it seemed to her as if the moments were ages, each laden with an agony of suspense, while she sat still in her forced inaction.

Jane crossed the lawn at last with something in her hand, and Margaret covered her face and moaned faintly. If this should be disappointment, how could she bear it? It *was* disappointment. The message turned out to be a card which Jane put into her hands, explaining as she did so that the young gentleman had come on important business, and wished particularly to see her, if only for a few moments.

"A young gentleman—important business," said Margaret faintly; "then it is not a telegram?"

"Who said it were?" asked Jane rather rudely. She knew very well that speak as she might her mistress would take very little notice of her now. "I said a young gentleman was in the parlor," she continued in a higher key, as if Margaret had been deaf, "and I've too much to do to be wasting *my* time argufying. Everybody can't set doing nothing all day like *some* folk I could tell of. Are you going to see him or are you not?"

"I will see him," replied Margaret quietly. "Ask him to wait a few minutes."

She had wondered only a moment before how she could bear the disappointment. It came, and she neither fainted nor wept, only there fell a chiller shadow over her heart—the darkness of her lot on earth seemed to deepen.

She watched with eyes from which all the light had gone out until Jane had re-entered the house, then she rose again, and this time no ultra-impetuousness delayed her. The name on the card puzzled her. She had a vague notion she had seen it somewhere before, but in her trouble her London remembrances were partially swamped. She scarcely knew even why she had decided to grant this young man an interview. She was only obeying a secret impulse: he might possibly be the bearer of a message.

She had not thought at the moment she left her seat that the parlor-window looked out upon the little garden; but so it was, and as languidly and with apparent pain she crossed the lawn its temporary occupant was gazing upon her.

Her appearance shocked him terribly. He had been in no way prepared for the change which that week of misery and loneliness had brought about. She did not look the same. Then, indeed, she had been sad, but the sadness had not absorbed her utterly—had not written on her face the haggard, weary hopelessness which it now bore.

The young man's heart contracted painfully; a sudden dismay seized him. He would have turned and fled. How could he bear to face this suffering? In its presence he felt weak and helpless as a child.

But he looked at her again, the white patient face with its halo of golden color, the weak languid steps, the beautiful outlines, the never-failing, unconscious grace, and as he looked the love of his heart surged in a great wave over his being. Unconsciously he clasped his hands, his brows knit, his form dilated.

"God helping me," he said in a low impassioned voice that swept upward from the innermost depths of his spirit—"God helping me, I will help her!"

Scarcely was the vow made before the door opened and Margaret and he were face to face. She looked at him for a moment, then held out her hand, smiling her recognition. "Sit down," she said with the quiet graciousness Arthur remembered so well, taking a seat herself at the same time; then suddenly she caught sight of what he brought, for Arthur had the scarf on his arm. Her quietness fled, she rose to her feet, and seizing his arm pointed to it eagerly: "Where did you find it? Whose is it? Why did you bring it here?"

She spoke and fell back on her chair, gasping for breath.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE BRINK OF MADNESS.

My eyes are full of tears, my heart of love;
My heart is breaking, and my eyes are dim,
And I am all aweary of my life.

Arthur's instinct had not erred. There was something more than the recovery of what she valued that made the sudden reappearance of her scarf a matter of great moment to Mrs. Grey. The facts of the case were these: The voice of many-tongued Rumor had been busy in the village with the wonderful history of the disappearance of the pretty child, whose vivacity and pleasant friendly ways had made her well known in the neighborhood. Through the medium of her laundress and a little girl from the National School, who came in the morning to help Jane, some of these little bits of gossip had made their way to Margaret.

The laundress poured into her ears the tale of how the little one had been met on the sands with a gentleman and a big dog on the afternoon of the day of her disappearance; the little girl chimed in with a true, full, and particular account of every item of the dress and appearance of both. One of these items puzzled Margaret. The girl declared positively that Miss Laura had carried her mamma's scarf upon her arm. Now, Margaret could not but remember that on that ever-memorable day she had worn the scarf herself. She had reason for connecting it with the interview between herself and L'Estrange. Strangely enough, from that very moment she had missed it.

In her first horror at the discovery of Laura's departure the lesser loss had naturally escaped her; when the girl mentioned the scarf, however, she remembered that she had not brought it home with her. But how could Laura have obtained possession of it? Margaret wearied herself with conjectures, but at last she came to this conclusion—she had left it on her seat among the bushes, Laura had gone there with her father anxious to find her, they had seen the scarf, and the little one had picked it up to take it back, for that Laura had willingly left her Margaret never imagined for a moment. Either this or else that the girl had been mistaken altogether. It was thus she had dismissed the subject of the scarf from her mind. It did not afford any clue; it did not alter in the remotest degree the fact of the child being lost to her, of her husband having cruelly and wantonly wronged her. But when the scarf reappeared in this strangely unexpected manner it was like a message from her child, a link by which it might be possible to trace her, and the first revulsion of feeling which its sight occasioned was so great as almost to deprive Margaret of her small remnant of strength.

She did not faint, though Arthur, when he saw the deadly pallor of her face, was about to spring to the door and call out for assistance. She warned him by a rapid gesture to do nothing of the kind. This was her first impulse; she pointed then to a caraffe of water. He poured some into a glass and brought it to her. It revived her partially. The color struggled back into her pale cheeks, she sat up and tried to smile—such a faint watery attempt at a smile that her companion could have gone on his knees, then and there, imploring her only to weep.

"I am very foolish," she said faintly, "but since we last met I have suffered, and suffering has made me weak. Have patience with me for one moment. Give me your arm, that will be best; the fresh air may revive me; and—walls have ears."

She looked round with a sudden terror in her eyes. To describe the effect of her words, of her weakness, on the inflammable heart of the young man would be impossible. He was beside himself with the longing to take her to his heart, to proclaim himself, once and for ever, her protector and champion. But love had taught him self-control. Trembling from head to foot, he still preserved an apparent composure. He took the hand she offered and raised it reverently to his lips, then placed it on his arm.

"Be calm, dear lady," he said gently, "I have come here with this express purpose to find some way out of your troubles, and, God helping me, I will."

The boy spoke slowly, deliberately. In his words there was all the fervor of a vow, all the hallowed binding power of a sacramental utterance; and to her for the moment it did not seem unnatural. He spoke again, after a short pause: "Mrs. Grey, do you think you can trust me?"

She looked up. There was a dreamy softness in her eyes and her voice was low: "Yes, I think I can. God knows I was sorely in need of a friend. But" (her voice changed, she looked round in a bewildered manner), "come out; I cannot speak to you here. I have a kind of feeling—dear me! how weak and childish I have become!—I hear voices, I see faces. I fancy sometimes I am being watched."

"You are weak and ill, Mrs. Grey; you should not be here alone. Let us go out to the shore; the sea-air will do you good. See! your hat is lying here."

She obeyed him. It almost seemed as if his voice had a certain power over her for the moment. He took her hand again and led her from the room and from the house, half supporting her from time to time. Neither spoke until the cottage was left far in the background, and then they were on the sands close by the sea.

"Shall we sit down here?" asked Arthur.

"Yes," she said, "we are alone; sea and sky—sea and sky." Then she paused with a bewildered look: "What am I saying? I know I wanted to speak to you, and now everything has gone."

This was far more bewildering to Arthur than her former state, for there was a wild, appealing look about her eyes which made him fear for her reason; but with the emergency came a certain power. It was truly a transformation. The boy was changed into a man. He stood up and taking both of Margaret's hands into his own, looked steadfastly into her eyes.

"Mrs. Grey," he said slowly and distinctly, "try and remember what has brought you here. Your child, little Laura!"

She put her hand to her head: "Laura! Laura! Do you know where she is, poor child? The heat has tired her; she must be lying down."

Arthur trembled, but he kept his eyes still fixed on those of his companion, which wandered hither and thither like restless stars.

"Mrs. Grey," he said again, "do you wish to find your child?"

Her eyes had begun to feel the power of his; they were falling under the spell of his steadfast gaze. Now was Arthur's time of trial, for the unmeaning wildness grew gradually into surprised displeasure. "Dear lady!" he said pleadingly, but not for a moment removing his gaze, "you have been patient; be so still. Do not let your sorrow overcome you utterly."

There spread a faint color over the dead whiteness of her face. The young man saw that for this time the danger had gone by. He had the tact to release her suddenly and to turn away for a walk along the shore. His true, unselfish love had given him eyes to see and a heart to understand. He knew that the return to a sense of her position would be painful to Margaret for more reasons than one. He left her to recover herself alone. Presently she called him. He went to her, and took his place by her side as if nothing had happened to disturb their conversation.

"Thank you," she said, gently raising her dark, troubled eyes to his face, "I understand you—you are my true friend;" and then a few tears that she could not keep back flowed over her pale cheeks. "Oh," she said, slowly and painfully, "if God will I shall learn; but, young man, it is a dreary time for learning. In our days of happiness and youth we put all this away, and the hour of trouble finds us without a refuge. You see I bore all the trouble," she continued, smiling faintly; "it is the glimmer of hope you have brought me that so nearly upset my poor, weak brain. But tell me, have you seen my little one?"

In reply Arthur gave, as clearly as possible, the story given to him by the waiter at the hotel in York, to all of which Margaret listened with rapt attention. Once or twice she was on the point of interrupting him, but she controlled herself to the end, and there was disappointment in the heavy sigh with which she answered him. "It is certainly my scarf," she said, taking it up and examining it attentively; "I could not possibly be mistaken, and as certainly that little child was my daughter—my lost Laura. Yes, it is all so probable. My little one's grief, the love of those around her, and her letter—it was to me—he never sent it. I am deceived, betrayed. Oh, Maurice! Maurice!"

Her grief seemed to overcome her. She covered her face with her hands, and once more, in his perplexity and distress, Arthur was on the point of throwing himself at her feet, of declaring his boundless love.

Before he could decide she looked up again and spoke with apparent calm: "There are some difficulties in the story. Are you sure the waiter said he was old and like a foreigner?"

"Perfectly certain; I could not possibly be mistaken."

"Then he must have changed wonderfully in the short time."

"Forgive me for asking, Mrs. Grey, but whom do you suspect of this atrocity? I would not be intrusive for the world; I only wish to be your friend." The young man's voice trembled; he went on more rapidly: "You must know, you must have seen, that I take no common interest in your concerns. I feel this is neither the time nor the place to force my own feelings upon you; but, Margaret, when I see you alone, friendless, when I know it is in my power to give you everything, to devote myself to you utterly, even to bring back perhaps those days of happiness of which you spoke, how can I resist the temptation of letting you know all? Since first I saw you your fair, sad face has haunted me; I can think of nothing else. Ah! I have been idle, good-for-nothing, but all that has passed away. Give me hope, and I will yet make myself worthy of you."

He spoke with such impetuosity that it was almost impossible to stop him. But when he paused for lack of breath, Margaret drew herself away, putting back gently his pleading hand. Perhaps it was well for her that this new excitement came. It seemed to restore her strength of mind, her gentle, womanly dignity. "Hush!" she said quietly; "you must not speak to me in this way. If you really care for me you will respect my lonely position. Arthur, I am married, and my one absorbing anxiety is to see my husband again before I die. Come, I do not mean to lose you as a friend; you have shown yourself a man, and a noble man, to-day; you will soon overcome this weakness."

Arthur was looking away over the sea. He was staggered for a moment, and yet he was not really surprised. His voice was a little husky as he answered, for after all he was only a boy, and he had taught himself to hope. "Forgive my folly and presumption," he said.

She put her hand on his shoulder with the caressing gesture of an elder sister. "I want a friend," she said, smiling into his downcast face. "You shall be my brother, Arthur. I have never had a brother, for I was an only child, and my sole friend in the wide world is my solicitor. He is a man of position and character, and yet—do you know? my loneliness makes me so sensitive—I sometimes feel inclined to distrust even him."

"Can you tell me his name?"

"It is rather a common one. Very likely you will not know it. Mr. Robinson—James, I think, is his Christian name."

"Of the firm of Robinson and ——?"

"Yes."

"Then, Mrs. Grey, your suspicions were only too well founded." He gnashed his teeth. "The old hypocrite! I trust you have not given him your confidence to any great extent."

Margaret turned pale: "Everything I have is in his hands. Only two days ago I gave him some valuable jewelry to ensure the speedy carrying out of my instructions."

"And he took it away with him, I suppose," Arthur smiled sardonically—"recommended patience and resignation. Ah! I know him well. But forgive me; I am allowing my feelings to run away with me and frightening you. The fact is that I happen to know something of your solicitor, and the very mention of his name excites me. Mrs. Grey, we must save you from him. Tell me once more, do you trust me?"

Margaret looked up into his frank, open face and smiled. "As I would my own brother," she replied heartily; "and in proof of it, if you can listen to a long, painful story, I will tell you my history, and how it is that you find me here in this little village alone and unprotected. You have given me the full confidence of your young, true heart; you have trusted in me, Arthur, in spite of much that must have seemed strange and mysterious. I will give you my confidence in return. But I think for to-day the exertion would be almost too much for me. Can you come again to-morrow, or must you go away at once?"

"I shall not leave this place until I have found out some way of helping you, Mrs. Grey; but if you really mean to trust me as your brother, will you let me say that I don't like the idea of your staying by yourself in this solitary house? You want some one with you upon whom you can thoroughly depend. I rather distrust your landlady; I can scarcely say why." They had risen from their seat on the sands, and were walking toward the little cottage. "As I came in," continued Arthur, "she entertained me—a perfect stranger, at least as far as she knew—with the story of your child's disappearance and your fainting-fit of that evening, seeming to expect me to give my errand in return."

"I rather distrust her myself," replied Margaret; "but one cannot always tell. Her manner certainly is unfortunate. I believe, however, that she is really a good kind of person, and her character stands high in the neighborhood. I do not like the idea of a change just now, but thank you all the same for the kind thought. You saw me, you must remember, at a weak moment; I am not always so foolish, and to-night I shall have something to think about. Here we are at the gate. Come in and have a cup of tea. By the bye, where are you staying?"

"At the hotel, Mrs. Grey; it's not very far from here. I think if you even called out to me from the window of your dining-room, I should hear you."

Margaret smiled: "I shall have no occasion, I hope, for the assistance of my champion till to-morrow; then you must hear my story, and help me to devise some plan for communicating with my husband and child."

"You think your husband has taken the child?" said Arthur, stopping suddenly.

"To-morrow, Arthur, to-morrow; before we discuss that point I must rest."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ACCOLADE OF KNIGHTHOOD.

We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial:
We should count time by heart-throbs.

And Margaret rested that night, for the first time since the evening when exhausted Nature had failed utterly and she had slept at the foot of her lost child's bed. There was a new feeling of rest and hope in her spirit; the events of the day had stimulated her; there was an uprising of the dormant courage and energy in her nature; she began to feel that something might yet be done. Jane was astonished that evening to find some small impertinence on her part rebuked by her mistress with all her old dignity, and to hear that if matters did not mend very considerably she would run the chance of losing her lodger. She was slightly alarmed, not only on this account, but also because this sudden resurrection of spirit might notify a change in her lodger's circumstances; but she kept her own counsel.

Breakfast was to be prepared for two. "Strange goings on," muttered Jane to herself, but this time she did not dare to express her feelings.

Arthur arrived early in the morning. He was excited and restless. With the impulsiveness of youth he had thrown himself heart and soul into the task that appeared to be opening out before him, and until some light had been thrown upon it he could not rest. He and Margaret breakfasted together, but by mutual consent nothing was said about the subject which engrossed them both until they had again left the house behind them, and were able to talk quietly, without need for caution, under the broad open sky.

She seemed so quiet, so self-contained, that Arthur began at last to fear that she had forgotten her promise, or rather that it had been given impulsively and withdrawn after calmer thought. And something of curiosity—which, by the bye, is pretty highly developed in the male portion of humanity—mingled with the true interest he took in Margaret's concerns. But she had not forgotten.

They had been sitting for a few moments by the sea-shore, talking of indifferent matters, when all at once she turned to him. "You ask me no questions," she said; "you are not curious to know more about me?"

Arthur reddened: "Not curious, Mrs. Grey. I am ready to hear whatever you wish to tell me. I know it can be nothing unworthy of yourself, and pray do not imagine that I wish to hear anything you care to conceal or that would give you pain to tell. I only desire to help you to the best of my ability."

For Arthur was a little hurt by the question. She smiled and rested her hand on his shoulder as she had done the day before, and her touch stirred the young man's heart to a strange mixture of feelings—pride, for it seemed to show that she depended on him, that his presence was a comfort to her, and yet a certain mortification. "She would not treat him in this way," he said to himself with somewhat of bitterness, "if she could understand in the slightest degree the feelings that had brought him to her—if she felt the remotest danger to her own heart in the companionship. He was a boy to her, nothing more."

But Margaret spoke, and her voice had a salutary effect In its sweet sadness, the remnant of selfishness was rebuked.

"Love took up the harp of life and smote on all the chords wit
might—
Smote the chord of self, that, trembling, passed in music out of
sight."

Thus it was with Arthur. Self trembled, but self passed. He was ready to do everything for the sake alone of *her* loveliness, of his love.

"You don't seem to care to ask me questions," she sai gently, "so I suppose I must take the matter into my ow hands, and unasked let you know something of my past life. I feel very old, Arthur—more fit to be your mother than even your elder sister, as I called myself just now; for life" —she looked across the sea, and her voice was low—"life should be reckoned not by the years, the days, the moments, but by the heart-pulses, the living, the battling, that the years and moments hold. I am not really old. I married at the age of nineteen, and then I had lived, I was older than my years; my little one was born when I was twenty, just seven years ago; that gives you my age—an easy piece of arithmetic. Many women are young at twenty-seven. I am old, old; hush, Arthur! you must not protest. When life has lost all its beauty and gladness, what can it be but dreary? And dreary days pass slowly. The last eighteen months might have been eighteen years, and that would make me old, even according to your reckoning. But I do not seem to get on very fast with my story. Ah! I must go back—such a long way—to the time when I was a girl, with a girl's freshness and ignorance of life, and fervent belief in herself and the future. I lost my parents even before that. I scarcely remember my mother. After her death my father left me at school and took to wandering. He did not survive her very long. But I was not left alone to battle with life. An aunt, my mother's only sister, took her place with me. She, too, had one daughter, and my cousin and I became like sisters; more than sisters—friends. She was younger than I, but she was everything to me. I don't think it can often be said of any woman that she loves another verily better than herself, but this was actually the case with my poor Laura. My loves, my accomplishments, my success were far more to her than her own. We were one, absolutely one—never a breath of discord between us; and now," Margaret paused and sighed deeply, "she has gone, and my after-sorrows have been so bitter that I have not even a tear to give to the memory of my first grief, the worst, I thought then, that I could ever encounter. We had a passion for travelling—Laura and I—and when she was about sixteen and I seventeen my aunt, who was then a widow, indulged us by a six months' trip on the Continent. It was to be strictly educational. My poor aunt! I can hear her now talking about all we should do, the regular hours of study, the steady application. Music was to be taken up in Germany, singing in Italy, languages everywhere. She was too gentle for the management of such volatile young ladies as we were. Laura and I had pretty much our own way. It was a pleasant time. How intensely we enjoyed the fresh, new life, the constant variety, the enlargement of ideas! Ah, if that could have been all! But I must hasten on. You see," she smiled faintly, "I am like a shivering mortal; afraid of the first plunge into icy waters, I hover about the brink."

"If it is painful to you, say no more, Mrs. Grey," said Arthur earnestly; "nothing you could possibly tell me would alter my feelings toward you."

She shook her head: "It is kind of you to wish to spare me, but I *must* go on. You know you are to be my friend, and if you are ever to help me you must know all. Laura and I were admired. Young English ladies are thought much of abroad. And very innocently, I think, we enjoyed the attention we excited. One of our admirers was continually appearing and reappearing. He seemed to find out our plans as if by intuition, was always on the spot when we wanted assistance, and on more than one occasion saved us much trouble and annoyance by a little timely help. A strange man who interested and puzzled us all, though to this day I fail to understand him. As far as we could make out, he was half Spanish, half French. Certainly he had the ease and grace belonging so peculiarly to France, with the fire and enthusiasm of the Spaniard. My aunt, I imagine, had full confidence in him, because his hair was gray, though at that time he could not have been more than forty, and his face was particularly plain. She could not have thought of his cherishing anything but friendly feelings for girls like Laura and me; indeed, I always have a kind of suspicion that she took his manifold attentions to our party as a tribute of homage to herself, for my aunt was a pretty woman, and by no means old to be Laura's mother. M. L'Estrange did everything he could to foster this feeling. How clever he was! his delicate flatteries! his personal kindnesses! his assiduous courtesy! Laura and I enjoyed them often, for we were wiser: *we* knew that he thought himself neither too old nor too ugly to fascinate *les demoiselles Anglaises.* And we both fell in love with him, though in different ways. Laura had no scruple in speaking of her affection. He was her 'bon père, her frère aîné;' she liked him better than any one she had ever seen; and he in return petted and caressed her, brought her cakes and bon-bons, took and demanded a thousand and one little daughterly attentions, at all of which my good aunt smiled complacently. But *she* did not know what *Laura* knew—that he seized every opportunity for speaking to me of love. She made opportunities—my sweet little cousin—for in her beautiful, unselfish way she could imagine nothing more delightful than this love-making ending in marriage, her sister and her *bon père* living together, with her for their little one, their 'chère fillette'—this last being one of his pet names for Laura.

"We met in Paris, we met again in many of the Italian towns, and he and I corresponded. I was very young; I knew nothing whatever of the world; it seemed to me strange that with all his professions of devotion he never mentioned marriage; but I believed his mode of living was precarious, and that as soon as something settled should be offered him he would ask me to pledge myself. This was Laura's view, too, for my little darling was older than her years, and she and I discussed the matter frequently. But at last we—or I should say I—found out what he was. Laura would scarcely believe anything against her bon père, but *I* knew that of him which I could not tell her. He and I parted, and were to one another as if we never had been even so much as friends. *I* suffered, for though I believe now that my imagination rather than my heart had been touched, still he had formed so large a part of my life that the parting could not but be painful for the time. I should have told you that all this had filled about two years; we had been twice in England, and twice again on the Continent, before I could make up my mind to break finally with my lover.

"It was in the course of the winter following my second visit, when my heart was still aching with the kind of loneliness which the withdrawal from my life of the one who had made all its romance for so many months could not but cause, that I met my husband, Maurice Grey, There could not have been a greater contrast. He had the fire of the Frenchman, but he lacked his dissimulation. He was in those days —God only knows how this trial may have changed him!— a true gentleman, frank, manly, courageous, but with none of the delicate finish, the courtly ease, the wily fascination of L'Estrange. I soon saw he loved me—so deeply that my refusal to become his wife would cause him the intensest pain And when he made me an offer I accepted him at first only because I was sorry for him and tired of my solitary position; but I came to love him, and with a *far* deeper, truer love than the former had been, for that had a certain sense of dissatisfaction about it. I never thoroughly understood M. L'Estrange; Maurice I honored as well as loved, and with my whole heart. Ah!"—she covered her face with her hands and moaned—"*if* he could only have known! But to return: I told him the whole story of my former love. It did not affect his feelings toward me. We were married, and two, three years passed by happily. I don't say we had *never* little breaks. I suppose in every married life these occur; and Maurice had one fault: he loved me too much—he was inclined to be jealous of my affection. I think, when I look back over that time, that the old story rankled in his mind; he could not quite shake off the idea that my duty was his, my love still another's. There came a time when our little child took ill. It was scarlet fever, and after it was over the doctors recommended sea-air. This was in the height of the London season, and my husband could not leave town. He took lodgings for us in Ramsgate, and came to see us whenever it was possible.

"Now comes the strange part of my story. Up to that time I had neither seen Monsieur L'Estrange nor heard of him since my marriage.

"Of course I thought of him sometimes, and my poor Laura before she died spoke of him often with lingering affection. At times I had a kind of morbid curiosity about him. I felt as if I should like to meet him, only to know whether I was perfectly cured—whether in my mature age he could exercise the same strange fascination over me as in my girlhood. This idea I never ventured to mention to Maurice. Would to God I had! I was walking one day on the Ramsgate pier when suddenly I saw him. My little girl and her nurse were with me. He recognized me instantly, looked at me in his curious way and lifted his hat politely. This chance meeting made a tumult in my brain, but I tried to treat it as a matter of very small importance. On the next day Maurice was to arrive, and here was my first false step. I said nothing to him of the meeting. I noticed him once or twice look at me strangely, as if trying to read my heart; but he said nothing and I said nothing. He went away, and on that very morning arrived a letter in the small, well-known handwriting. I knew it was from *him*, and yet, and yet—God forgive me!—I opened and read it. It was a simple matter, after all, claiming common acquaintanceship, asking permission to call on me. He was waiting at the hotel; if I chose to forbid him he would go no further; if he received no answer he would be with me in the course of the afternoon. I persuaded myself that this meant nothing; we should meet once more—meet as strangers. I should have the opportunity of proving to myself how foolish my girlish weakness had been. And to forbid his coming, what would it be but a tacit acknowledgment that he still possessed a certain power over my heart? I decided to allow him to come, and through the afternoon I sat in-doors, waiting with (I will always maintain) no stronger feeling than curiosity in my mind. It was nearly evening before he arrived. I was in some trepidation, but he behaved perfectly; his manner was easy and natural; he seemed to forget there had been anything but simple friendship between us. We chatted pleasantly for about half an hour, and then he rose to take his leave. The room was in half darkness; I had sent my little one to bed. I put out my hand carelessly, as I would have done to any ordinary stranger, but a sudden change seemed to have come over him. To this day I have never been able to account for it. He who had been so calm only a few moments before was trembling with excitement. He seized my offered hand, and before I knew where I was he was kneeling at my feet, pouring out words that he had no right to speak nor I to hear. Before I could thrust him away, before I could give voice to my indignation—ah! shall I ever, ever forget that moment?—the door opened slowly, and

I saw my husband's face as I had never seen it before—dark, threatening, suspicious. It all passed in a moment. I was conscious of sinking down in a chair, and covering my face with my hands to hide my burning shame, for my husband suspected me. I heard high words, and when I looked up again Maurice and I were alone.

"'That man has escaped with his life,' he said sternly; 'he has you to thank for it.' I tried to explain, but he stopped me harshly. It was a stormy night. The wind was blowing about the house in fierce gusts. Oh how every detail of that terrible time clings about my brain!

"My husband left me in the room alone. I sat there for it might be an hour, as darkness had come before he returned. When he came in a carpet-bag was in his hand; he was evidently dressed for travelling. I sprang to my feet. I threw my arms around him; I implored him to stay and listen to me, but he only answered with that dark suspicious look. He loosened my hold at last—he reached the door; as he opened it there swept a great blast of wind into the room. I shall always feel thankful for that, for he saw me shivering as I lay exhausted on the sofa, and he came back suddenly to cover me from head to foot in his travelling-rug; then he kissed me—my poor Maurice!—and I saw something like relenting in his sad eyes, but I was too weak to tell him all: the soft moment passed, and I have never seen him since."

Margaret's voice sank into a wail. Her story had carried her away, so much so that she had almost forgotten her companion, and when Arthur, who had been listening intently, sprang suddenly to his feet, she was almost startled.

"It is as we thought," he cried impetuously—"my cousin's very words; she said it was some dreadful misunderstanding. But it shall be set right. Mrs. Grey, you have given me your confidence nobly and truly. It shall not be in vain. I have a kind of feeling that it will be given to me to disentangle this coil."

And then he knelt down before her on the sands. "Margaret," he said—and as he spoke the name with all a boy's timidity his young face flushed and his eyes seemed to burn with a steady, lustrous shining—"long ago, in the days of chivalry, ladies used to send out their knights wearing their colors to fight for them and for truth and for justice. Make me your knight, let me fight your battles. So help me God, I will stand by you as your own brother might do; I will seek through the world till I find your husband, I will never rest till I have righted you! Will you accept my service?"

She smiled, and bending forward kissed him on the brow.

"It is the accolade of knighthood," she said. Then they rose together and went toward the cottage, for the sun was high in the heavens.

CHAPTER XII.

"I SHALL LIVE AND NOT DIE."

This world is the nurse of all we know,
  This world is the mother of all we feel,
And the coming of death is a fearful blow
  To a brain unencompassed with nerves of steel.

THEY had further discussion that evening. Margaret told her young protector, after she had rested a little, how from that day she had been persecuted by the attempts of L'Estrange to force himself upon her. How at last she had found this little seaside village, and had rested there with her child, hoping its isolation and retirement would hide her. She told of her adventures in London, of the escape so ably managed by Adèle, of the discovery of her hiding-place, of that interview, and of her persecutor's concluding words, which, as she believed, had foreshadowed her present trouble.

"This is the mystery," said Mrs. Grey in conclusion, looking down at the scarf, "for a vague idea begins to dawn on me that I did *not* leave it on that seat on the sandhills. I remember, or I think I remember—all that night is in a kind of maze—looking for it, and being annoyed by the belief that M. L'Estrange had taken it away with him for some reason best known to himself."

"What!" said Arthur eagerly; "then, after all, this might be explained. Mrs. Grey, do you know I begin to have a dawning suspicion that your husband was not the person who took away your child? In the first place, to act in this way would be very unlike an English gentleman, such as, from your account, I imagine Mr. Grey to be; then that threat of the villain who was annoying you was *un peu fort*—one might possibly see daylight through it; then—"

He stopped, for Margaret was giving no attention to his reasons. "*Not* my husband!" she cried, and there came a sudden light into her face. "If I could only think so, but even to wish it would be wrong. Think of my poor little darling in strange hands!"

"That need scarcely alarm you. The person with whom your child was seemed to take every care of her."

"And you think that person was—?" Margaret fixed her eye on Arthur. The dreadful wildness was gathering there once more.

"Dear Mrs. Grey," he said earnestly, "I only say I have my suspicions. Trust me, I will leave no stone unturned to find your husband and child. I *have* a clue to both."

"What do you mean?"

Arthur gave in answer the story of the Russian, omitting, of course, the suspicion of the fair St. Petersburgers.

"My first step," he said, "shall be to look up Count Orloff. He has set the Russian police to work, and I believe has found out something through Mrs. Grey's solicitor in England. Your child and the gentleman with whom she is will certainly be conspicuous travellers. I made inquiries at York, at the hotel and station, and found that about a week ago they must have taken the train from York to Southampton, so it is highly probable they were bound for some foreign port. We must set agents to work at Cherbourg, Havre, Lisbon and Gibraltar, for I think it scarcely likely they can have left Europe. Courage, my dear Mrs. Grey! I think we shall light upon them. *I* will follow the track most likely to have been taken by your husband, leaving the recovery of the child in the hands of my solicitor—a very different person, I can assure you, from Mr. Robinson—for if, as I suspect, this villain has taken his revenge by depriving you of your child, remember, it is an offence punishable by law, and he shall be hunted down till his crime is discovered and himself traced."

The young man's form dilated, he stood erect, he looked what he was—an Englishman, strong, vigorous, full of noble impulse, of physical power, of untiring energy. The languor of the fashionable, the elegant good-for-nothingness, the nonchalant indifference, had all gone; he had found an object and was ready to throw himself heart and soul into its pursuit.

Margaret listened to his hope-inspiring words, and she felt herself animated with a new courage. She turned to her young protector with glistening eyes: "And you are ready to do all this for me? How shall I thank you?"

"By being strong and courageous," he answered; "but, Mrs. Grey, it is I who should talk of gratitude. You have changed me from an idle good-for-nothing into a man with an object before him, an aim to which all his soul is given. I know it is a good thing. I feel it. It will be my first battle with the world's injustice. God grant it may succeed! I believe it will. There is one thing more. You tell me that your landlady, in relating the story of your child's disappearance, described your husband. Now, either one of two things. My theory, supported by the waiter at York and suggested by the man's own words, is wrong altogether, or else she has been bribed to give you false information. In the latter case—which, I must say, rather fits in with my own ideas—she ought to be watched; and certainly this is no place for you. Who knows what she might not do in dread of discovery? Here you are more or less in her power. Think a moment. Have you no friends?"

Margaret turned pale. "Jane has certainly acted strangely of late," she said, after a pause; "she has even been insolent once or twice when, as she thought, I was too weak to notice it; but I cannot think her quite so bad as you seem to imagine. I do not wish to leave this place yet; you see, I have become accustomed to it. Then I have a kind of feeling that here, if anywhere, my trouble is to end. You remember that picture which was the first link between you and me? Do you know why it appealed to me so strangely? It was like a kind of dream I have often had. I used to say in the old days that I had what Goethe called the second sight. Sometimes at superstitious moments I was inclined to think this dream a kind of vision of the future, and it comforted me beyond measure. It has come so often and in such different forms, but it always ends in the same way—Maurice coming back to me over the sea, and living here in my quiet corner. If I could tell you how much I have built on this small foundation! But the dream only comes with the sea-sounds. In those miserable London days I used even to pray for it at night, I was so utterly hopeless; it never came."

Arthur looked thoughtful: "I shall see my cousin before I go; she has been very delicate lately, and my aunt, I believe, is very anxious for her to have change of air. Perhaps she would allow her to come here and stay with you for a time."

Margaret shook her head: "I cannot hope for that, though of all things I think it would be the pleasantest; but do not be uneasy on my account. No doubt I shall manage very well by myself; and you will let me hear whenever any trace has been found?"

"Indeed I will, Mrs. Grey; and cheer up, for I believe that will be soon."

"God grant it!"

Margaret clasped her thin hands together. She looked so frail, so shadow-like in the failing light, that Arthur's heart gave a sudden bound. What if she were fading—if, before he could gladden her by the news she craved, her spirit should have passed from earth? The thought made him impatient. He longed to be up and doing, taking the first step at least in his self-set task. And here would be a plea to urge with her husband. If he had ever loved her, surely, surely he would forget everything and fly back to her side when he should hear of her state.

Arthur was ready with youth's burning eloquence to plead for her. He felt he could paint her in such colors that not the stoniest heart could resist him. And while he was thinking it all out, already at his goal, pouring into the ears of the man he sought the history that had come upon his own youth like a life-giving power, of the beautiful, patient lady wasting her fair life away in faithful solitude, she turned from the open window, crossed the little room and sat down by his side.

"God has been good to me," she said gently. "I thought He would take me away in my sadness, life's broken entangled threads lying loosely in my hands, but now He has given

me back my hope. I shall live and not die, at least not yet. Young man, there is something in the Bible about the 'blessing of those who are ready to perish.' Surely in the sight of the All-pitiful that must be a good thing. It is yours. Poor that I am, I can offer you no more."

Arthur's eyes glistened. "I hold it more precious than gold," he said, stooping over her hand and raising it to his lips; "with this I think I could engage the world."

CHAPTER XIII.

ARTHUR AT WORK.

> Wait, and Love himself will bring
> The drooping flower of knowledge, changed to fruit
> Of wisdom.

And so Arthur Forrest's little love-dream was dispelled. In Margaret's presence, with her calm, saddened beauty before him, her gentle words in his ears, he had not seemed to feel it; for as at the first her beauty had come upon him like a heaven-sent message, arousing dormant emotion, awaking his spirit from youth's self-worship, so now it continued its work by slaying absolutely the still dominant self within him. He had thought and hoped and longed and chafed through the weeks of London life, haunted by her presence and by the dream of gaining her. He saw her again, he recognized that she was not for him, and he submitted, without a single wish to drag down the goddess of his idolatry from her seat in the clouds to a lower seat by his side. Arthur was young. Had the dream come later he might have acted differently, but as yet he was tolerably free from the world-wisdom which so many able teachers were ready to impart; besides, there was that in her quiet dignity, in her ready confidence, in her natural way of accepting his knight-errantry, that would have effectually checked any presumption. She did not even seem to imagine that the passion she had inspired in the breast of this man, so much her junior, could be anything but transitory, and in her presence he acquiesced calmly.

The reaction came when he was alone in the hotel that night. To lose no time he had started for York in the evening, and the officious waiter, his friend of the day before, had procured for him the same rooms which he had occupied then. Peopled they had been with the creations of his fancy evoked by her, and the prospect of seeing her again; he returned to them disappointed, denuded of hope, and there was a rue look in his young face as once more he inflicted the echo of his restlessness on the innocent occupant of the room below. For when all had been said and done—when he should have compassed heaven and earth to restore her to happiness and peace—when (for Arthur never dreamt of failure) through his efforts, and his alone, she should be enjoying once more the position from which by no fault of her own she had been torn—when her husband should return to his faith and devotion, and her child be given back to her arms,—then for himself, what? A grateful remembrance at most. Their lives would drift apart, ever more widely: he who believed he should be able to make her joy would yet form no part of it. His very love would have to be smothered—to be as if it had not been. With all the grand sentiments in the world to set against it, this is not an easy thing to bear.

The greatest hero, the most self-abnegating being that ever lived, must, I think, have had these moments of reaction—moments when the heart, looking inward, aches a little for the poor trembling self which must be buried, hidden away out of sight, if the life would be whole and consistent.

And Arthur Forrest was no hero; only a young gentleman trained in the school of luxury and self-pleasing, and for the first time brought face to face with necessity. One thing in his favor was that it was necessity—that there could be no beating about the bush, no half measures. As a gentleman and a man of honor he was bound to serve the lady of his choice, and to serve without hope of recompense—such recompense, at least, as he had pictured to himself only twenty-four hours before.

Perhaps nothing better could have happened to the young man than this early enforced lesson of submission to the law of necessity. Young men start off on life's race like well-fed stallions, scenting the goal afar off, and if the world be proderately submissive they ride over her rough-shod till her weeds and nettles sting them and they fall back panting from the course. But if the yoke be borne early, submission becomes a habit and its difficulty is infinitely less. Arthur, however, could not be expected to be thankful for the salutary lesson, and what wonder that when the first excitement of planning and scheming, of playing the grand *rôle* of disinterested benefactor was over, he looked a trifle blue and crestfallen, called himself hard names, and quarrelled with what he was for the moment pleased to look upon as his "ridiculous age!"

There is something in the forced inaction of night, when it is not occupied entirely with its legitimate tenant, Sleep, to nurture morbid thoughts and gloomy ideas. Like misshapen ghosts they flee with the daylight—when, that is to say, their sources are not very deep in the spirit, imbedded there by cruel, unbending circumstance, for then night is the relief-bringer, morning has the pale terrors of reality in its train. Arthur's woes were rather of the imagination than the heart. Morning and action dissipated them.

He was up early, and before midday had satisfied the proprietor of the hotel about the ownership of the Indian scarf, had gathered fresh particulars from the waiter, had cross-examined Jane, the soft-hearted chambermaid, with all the acumen of a barrister, had caught the morning mail, and was far on his way to London.

The fruit of his first day's exertions—for he could not rest until something had been done—was that he had obtained the permission of his guardians (merely nominal, for he was within three weeks of attaining his majority) for a lengthened absence from England, and that by the next morning's mail a messenger was ready to start for Middlethorpe, with a hopeful missive from himself and a little casket containing the jewelry which had been left to the grasping hands and predatory instincts of Mr. Robinson.

The messenger was an elderly woman, with gray hair and a pleasant, homely face. She had been Arthur Forrest's nurse, and his mother had left her a pension amply sufficient to keep her in comfort and supply her few wants. The old woman's affection for her nursling was so great that she had never lost sight of him, and the young man, who knew how much he owed to her tender care, had gratified her in his youth and manhood by visiting her from time to time.

Old Mrs. Foster had been the recipient of Arthur's confidence more than once, and she had helped him out of many a boyish scrape. In this dilemma he thought of her. The kind old woman took an interest in his tale, especially because there seemed to be no scheme attached to it for the entrapping of her darling. That he should be led away by the snares of womankind was a subject of constant terror to Mrs. Foster.

"Tak' tent of the lassies, my bairn," she would say to him at times; "they're an awfu' sight tae deep for the lads."

But on this occasion there seemed to be no lassie in the question; only a suffering lady, who, in the very teeth of her bairn's most dangerous admissions (over these the old woman shook her head solemnly), had confessed to a husband still, as it seemed, in the land of the living.

She consented readily—all the more so, perhaps, because of the power it would give her of watching the matter—to what Arthur had been almost afraid to mention, that she herself should become for the time being a kind of confidential servant to the lady, supposing Margaret herself would permit it. In any case she would not shrink from the office of messenger and from the task of observation, for with her young master she was of opinion that the landlady was a dangerous person.

It was a tolerable amount of work for one day, and Arthur was satisfied. He felt that the stone was set rolling at all points, and that it would reach its destination in time if human skill and human energy could accomplish anything.

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO INTERVIEWS.

> One equal temper of heroic hearts,
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

MR. ROBINSON was virtuously indignant and highly incensed at the turn matters had taken. He talked loudly at home and among his religious friends—who were accustomed to small roughnesses in his style, but attributed them to the manly nature of his Christianity—about the young jackanapes, another of your fine gentlemen, who impudently meddled with what could not possibly concern him; but in presence of Arthur Forrest's young chivalry he was rather more subdued than usual. Not that he appeared to be crestfallen—that would have been a tacit acknowledgment of feeling himself to be in the wrong: he only took the matter as was becoming to a man and a Christian to take it, laying himself down ostentatiously for his young friend to tread upon, but bringing in from time to time unexpected hints about the youthfulness of the course of conduct he was pursuing, about the necessity for common sense in dealing with the world, and the certainty he felt that sooner or later his young friend would find out his mistake.

Arthur left him with no victory but such as was represented by the casket, which Mr. Robinson had willingly surrendered.

The lawyer assured Arthur Forrest, showing his teeth and smiling pleasantly, that when he knew more of the world he would be aware that what Mrs. Gray had done was a thing done every day. He could show—and he opened drawer after drawer to substantiate his statement—pounds' worth of jewelry left, and left wisely, by ladies who had no need for it for the moment, in the keeping of their solicitor. If Mrs. Grey had ceased to repose confidence in him—he shrugged his shoulders to prove his entire indifference—he could only say that the sooner she took charge of her own valuables the better, both for her and for himself. Certainly, she had acted rather strangely after all the trouble he had taken in the affair for very inadequate remuneration—and *his* time, as all the world knew, was valuable; but one must not expect gratitude in this world. He only trusted—for he could not help still taking a certain interest in the matter—that everything would be far better managed.

Arthur left the office, in fact, with a very bewildered feeling about his brain. He had known Mr. Robinson well by rumor, but hitherto he had not been brought into very close contact with him. This interview shook him considerably. He was at a loss to account for the strange mixture in the man—his apparent frankness and bonhomie, his real selfishness and hypocrisy. Before men and women know the world well they find it difficult to understand mixtures. People, with them, are ranged into two vast classes, each class bearing written on its brow in legible characters the legend of its belonging. The good are in their imagination all frankness, courage, ingenuity; the bad have the malignant scowl of a villain in a play. They are totally unprepared for the frank address, the words of common sense and true wisdom, which men whose hearts are bad have picked up in intercourse with their betters, and which they use daily in the world as a kind of current coin whose worth is incalculable. Mr. Robinson had plenty of this, and it somewhat staggered Arthur. But the recollection of his friend strengthened him, and he cast aside as unworthy all the lawyer's hints.

Quietly he requested Mr. Robinson to use neither time nor money in the effort to find Mr. Grey, and to prepare for having Mrs. Grey's affairs most thoroughly looked into, as she had friends who would see justice done to her. The lawyer's parting shrug and voluble assurance of entire indifference were lost on the young man. He had a more satisfactory interview later in the same day. His own man of business, Mr. Golding, was shrewd and well versed in character. He knew where his own interests lay, and when it was possible he guarded them carefully; but he was actually—what Mr. Robinson made a loud profession of being—a God-fearing, conscientious man. He, or the firm he represented, and which had succeeded to him from his father, had taken charge of the property inherited by Arthur Forrest for some generations. Naturally, then, he took a deep interest in it, and it was a matter of some moment to him that the young heir should place the same confidence in the firm as his father had done before him.

When, therefore, he came with his tale—a tale that to the man of the world sounded rather romantic and far-fetched—Mr. Golding listened patiently. He did not fail to represent to his client that the business on which he was embarking was of a highly delicate nature; that action of his might very possibly be looked upon as an impertinent interference; that in any case his success—in one at least of the objects he had set before him—was extremely doubtful. Not that there could be much difficulty in finding Mr. Grey. If he should still be above ground he would be found; if not, the fact could easily be ascertained. The question was, whether, in the first place, there had not been some motive beyond that imagined for his long absence (it was difficult for a hard-headed man of business like Mr. Golding even to imagine how any man could behave so impulsively in such an emergency), and in this case his return was certainly improbable; whether, in the second place, should he have left England solely on this account, his belief in his wife's unworthiness would not be too deeply rooted to yield to a few enthusiastic words; whether, in the third place, granted even that his mood toward his wife had softened in the interval, he would not resent the intervention of a stranger, and be inclined to feel annoyance at a stranger's intimate knowledge of his affairs.

To all this Arthur only answered, "I know there are difficulties: I am prepared for them. I will set to work with great prudence, but set to work I *must*. The question is this, Do you feel inclined to help me?"

The shrewd man of law saw that his young client was in earnest, and he demurred no longer. "I will help you willingly," he said. "I only wished to prepare you for certain difficulty and very probable disappointment. And now to work. This gentleman was last heard of at St. Petersburg?"

"Yes. He left there ill and evidently dissatisfied. His friends feared he had some intention of committing suicide."

The lawyer's lip curled ever so slightly: "The ladies were in want of a bit of sensation. Probably Mr. Maurice Grey is forgotten by this time. More likely, I should say, late hours and a gay life had knocked him up. There is no city where a man can live faster than in St. Petersburg. He left, probably, to get a little rest, and would not write for fear of another pressing invitation. But he can't live on air, wherever he may be. Can you tell me if he derives his income from property in England?"

"I believe he does, and that he communicates from time to time with his solicitor in London. I have *his* name too. But I believe he is close, or has been recommended to secresy by his client."

Arthur passed a card to Mr. Golding, who glanced at it and gave a sudden exclamation: "*That* Grey! Why, I know all about him. You have a mortgage on his property, Mr. Forrest, and a very first-rate security it is, too; we could not wish for better. I will write at once to my friend Edwards appointing an interview. There's a little matter of business between us, so he will suspect nothing. Then I shall draw him on to Mr. Grey. He has once or twice entertained me with an account of his eccentricities. You must not be *too* sanguine. I believe Mr. Grey has a kind of objection to letting any one know his true address; so, even upon the authority of Edwards, I may be sending you off on a wild-goose chase. However, if we hear something of his whereabouts, we shall have less difficulty in tracing him."

"How strange," said Arthur meditatively, "that I should have had something to do with him all this time without knowing it! But about the other matter, Golding—the child?"

"There I disagree with you entirely. That any man can have taken so stupid a revenge is really absurd, even to imagine. No: Mrs. Grey's first impression was correct. Her husband wished to overlook the education of his daughter. He carried out his purpose in a most unwarrantable manner; but evidently the man is soured—*I* should say scarcely responsible. Perhaps he sent an agent to secure the child, and this would account for the gray hair and foreign appearance. More probably still, a good deal of this was put on for effect by your informant."

"I don't think so," returned Arthur. "It is just possible, as you say, that Mr. Grey deputed some one to fetch his child, but it would be a very strange kind of proceeding."

"Not half so strange as your foreigner encumbering himself with such a charge out of mere jealousy. However, all this remains to be proved. Southampton, you say? I will send a clerk there to make inquiries—a sharp fellow; he has often done me good service in this line. He shall start this afternoon. It's a pity it has been delayed so long. If Robinson had understood his duty, he would have set this search on foot at once. In eight days no one knows what can be done with a child. However, I have great hope of a clue from Southampton. As you say, they must be conspicuous travellers. And now, my dear sir, you are interesting yourself very much about your neighbors, but are you aware that in three weeks' time we shall have to give an account of our proceedings during your minority? It is quite necessary that you should make some provision for the transaction of your business, especially as, if you follow out your present plans, your whereabouts for the next few months may be doubtful."

"I have thought of it," replied Arthur gravely, "and I hope I am not totally unaware of the responsibilities of my position. For the present, however, I shall ask you to continue to take the entire management. When this affair which occupies me so much is over, I shall be ready to receive your statement, which I know will be satisfactory in every way." He smiled as he spoke and held out his hand.

Mr. Golding was surprised as well as touched. It was pleasant to the man of business—whose labor in the cause of young Forrest's family had been to a certain degree a labor of love—to find his client able to take a practical, common-sense view of his position, and to appreciate his upright and assiduous care.

He smiled in return, and shook the young man's hand warmly: "You gratify me, my dear sir. Yes, indeed, I have done my best, my very best, for the estate, as my father did before me; and the day upon which I shall deliver up my accounts and those of your guardians into your hands is one to which I have long looked forward with pleasant anticipation. In the mean time I may say, in the name of your guardians that you can draw upon us in excess of your ordinary allowance. There are certain accumulations of income which we always thought would serve for some such purpose as this projected journey. We could have wished, of course, that it had been delayed, but as matters stand for you to anticipate their receipt by a few days can be an affair of no great moment to us."

And thus it was arranged. Arthur's way was smoothed, and nothing remained to be done but the attainment of some clue to Maurice Grey's place of refuge.

CHAPTER XV.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER AT LAST.

> If that there be one scene in life wherefrom
> Evil is absent, it is pure early love.

ADÈLE'S languor increased with the summer. The heat, which had grown intense in and about London, the fatigues of the season, the anxiety about Arthur and their mutual friend Mrs. Grey,—all these worked upon a constitution in which the seeds of delicacy were deeply rooted.

Mrs. Churchill began to be anxious, and to cast about for some suitable method of giving her daughter change of air. Nothing presented itself for the moment. It was too early for Scarborough or Whitby; only plebeians frequented Brighton in July; against the Continent, Switzerland, Germany or the Italian lakes Adèle protested loudly, and the good Mrs. Churchill felt a certain sinking of heart at the prospect of putting the breadth of the Channel between herself and England during the London season. The little gossip of society, the *projets de mariage*, the whispers of political complications, the scandals of high life were dear to Mrs. Churchill's soul. And at this special time, when the air was rife with rumor, it would have been irritating, to say the least of it, to go out into the blank of an existence from which the *Morning Post* and *Court Journal* would of necessity be excluded. But none of these things could alter the fact. Adèle was pining in the great city; she wanted change of air.

Indecision and anxiety are not improving to the temper. The good-natured Mrs. Churchill became sharp and irritable. She was annoyed with Adèle for being ill, and with Fate for not delaying her illness by a few weeks, when London could be left without a pang, and the bracing climate of Scarborough would have been open to them; she was angry with Arthur for his new independence and mysterious course of conduct, and especially with that absurd Mrs. Grey, who seemed, by means of her romantic story and inexplicable power of fascination, to be at the root of all the inconvenience. The worst of it was that this internal effervescence could be allowed very little external vent, for Arthur and Mrs. Grey were out of reach, and the doctors, several of whom had been consulted, had given express orders that Adèle should be kept as quiet as possible. Of course it was idle to rave against Fate, for Fate is calm and impersonal, and only bruises the breasts of the tumultuous. The servants were the only sufferers, but they took their mistress's ill-temper with great equanimity, knowing their personal comforts would not be one jot diminished, and that this storm would pass as others had passed before it. But Mrs. Churchill could not always keep her annoyance from her daughter, and on one of these hot days her feelings became quite too much for her.

Adèle was on the sofa again, deeply engrossed in one of her pet volumes with the calf-skin binding. Her mother had been wandering about from one position to another in the vain effort to cool herself; she had tried at least a dozen different fans, she had bathed her face and hands again and again in eau-de-cologne, she had read a little and worked a little, had taken up the paper and thrown it down again, had sighed and fumed and bustled till her state was really pitiable.

"Adèle," she cried at last, "for Goodness' sake put down that book. Whatever the doctor may say about your not being crossed, I'm quite sure—and so I told him only yesterday—that so much reading is very bad for the mind, especially in hot weather. Why, *I* can't even get through the paper;

and you look as pale as a ghost. Oh," wringing her hands in desperation, "if I only knew what to do with you!"

"Only don't excite yourself, mamma," said Adèle languidly.

"Excite myself? That is not a very dutiful way of addressing your mother, Adèle, especially when what you call my excitement is solely on your account."

"I know it, mamma dear," said Adèle gently, putting down the obnoxious volume. "Forgive me if I annoyed you, but really I wish so much that you would cease being anxious about me. I shall be better as soon as ever the weather is a little cooler."

"And how long may we suppose that will be?" Mrs. Churchill panted, and began again agitating desperately the latest fan, a feathered one. "I tell you what it is, if this goes on I shall shut up the house and leave London altogether."

She spoke defiantly, as if London would be greatly the sufferer by such a step.

Adèle shook her head: "You would certainly not like it, dear. No: I'll tell you what to do. You must get Mary Churchill to stay with you here. It will be pleasant for her to see a little of London, and you know Aunt Mary will be charmed. Send me away somewhere for a fortnight. I have a kind of longing for the sea." The young girl closed her eyes. "I can imagine it, mamma, always so fresh and beautiful—Lord Byron's 'deep and dark blue ocean.' How nice it would be after the tiresome, dusty streets and squares! I shall get better there directly; I feel it."

Mrs. Churchill sighed impatiently: "One would think to hear you, Adèle, that a young lady could live at the seaside by herself, without any protection. Pray, little Miss Wisdom, how am I to send you to this sea which you describe so romantically? I do believe those poetry-books are at the root of all the mischief. I wish they were all drowned in that same blue ocean. Blue, indeed! *I* never see it anything but a dirty gray. I suppose I want the fine poetic insight. And instead of helping me you have started another difficulty. I promised your aunt Mary to show your cousin a little of the world this season; of course it would have been pleasanter for you to have gone out together; you are such different styles that it might have been very safely done. I must say it is extremely tiresome to have all one's plans upset. I wouldn't mind so much if I could see any way out of all this, but really and truly I was never so utterly at sea in my life."

"Write to Aunt Mary," said Adèle cheerfully, "and leave me to manage the rest."

"Leave you, indeed! I might as well leave a baby. I know your unpractical schemes of old Dear me! I wish I could think of some feasible plan."

"Only don't fret yourself, dear," said Adèle, kissing her mother affectionately; "and listen! is that not Arthur's knock? I dare say he can help us."

"*Very* likely!" said Mrs. Churchill in a manner that was meant to be splendidly satirical. "However," she continued, "I must dress now, but I shall come down again before I go out; and remember, Adèle, if I find he has excited your mind by any of his absurd romances, I shall forbid him the house at once."

Adèle's eyes twinkled pleasantly at this awful threat. She knew her mother too well to have even the faintest fear of its fulfilment.

When Arthur came in she saw in a moment that he was changed. The languid, quasi-sentimental look had gone from his face, his step was brisk and vigorous, he held himself erect; he even seemed to his cousin's partial eyes to have grown since she saw him last. For the moment as she gazed she trembled. It was all over, then. He had come to tell her of success; but, reproving herself for the selfishness of the thought, she held out her hand with a smile: "The sea-air has done you good, Arthur; you look a different person."

He looked down upon her kindly: "I think I *am* better, Adèle, and in more ways than one; but, my poor little cousin, I can't return the compliment; you look as pale as a ghost. What in the world has Aunt Ellen been doing with you?"

Adèle flushed painfully, for she was impatient to know what his experience had been: "Please don't mind my looks, Arthur. Remember I am curious. Be kind to me, dear," she smiled faintly; "keep me no longer in suspense. Your eyes tell me something has been done."

Arthur sat down, and took one of her hands in his: "What do you read in them, Adèle?"

She looked away, shading her face with her hand: "That you have something to live for at last—that she, the woman whom you love—and I believe she is worthy of your love"—it was bravely said, though there was a certain rebellious rising in the poor little throat; she paused a moment to choke it down, then continued very calmly—"that Margaret has chosen you for her protector, that you are already busy planning to restore her to happiness."

Arthur smiled again, then stooped over his cousin's sofa: "Why do you look away, Adèle? If I should say that all this is true, that you are the most penetrating little lady in the world, would you not be glad, seeing that I have only obeyed you?"

"Don't, Arthur, don't," was the stifled answer, for he was struggling with the hand which hid her averted face, and tears were in her eyes, tyrannous exponents of a secret she would have died rather than reveal. Arthur might have descanted with reason on the capriciousness of woman's character, but he did not; he only smiled very tenderly, and drew the tear-stained face to a surer shelter as he told in a few earnest, manly words of the experiences of the last few days, and of the task he had set himself.

"Adèle," he whispered in conclusion, "I am cured. When I left you my brain was full of mad ideas. *She* showed me their folly, and now I can admire her, I can honor her, I can even love her, as a brother might, with the purest desire for her happiness, which I still earnestly hope to restore by giving her back her husband. For myself, my dream has changed. Listen, Adèle, dear. Look up at me once: my present hope is this—to strive by every means in my power to make myself worthy of the gentlest, the most womanly, the noblest—"

She read the rest in his eyes, and with a smile that irradiated her face till it was absolutely beautiful she looked up and put her finger on his lips: "Hush, dear, hush! say no more; you make me ashamed of myself, I have been so impatient and foolish. But, Arthur, I am happy now, *so* happy!"

She rested her head on the sofa and looked up at him, her blue eyes shining and her cheeks glowing with soft excitement; a little smile of contentment was playing about her lips, her golden hair fell back from her forehead in rippling waves; she was fairer than ever before, for nothing is so beautifying as happiness, especially to women of Adèle's type.

Her cousin felt it. He looked at her with a smile. "Do you know, Adèle," he said gently, "I never thought you beautiful before, but you *are* beautiful. What is it that is new to me in your face, little cousin?"

She shook her head: "I can't tell, dear, unless perhaps it may be that never in all my life have I been so *very*, very happy."

By which answer it will be seen that Adèle was but a novice in the ways of the world. She was not afraid, now she knew her love was returned, of letting its fullness be seen.

Let him love her little or much, that he loved her was enough. From the moment that was known she could not help letting him see she was his without reserve.

And Arthur's was not a nature to abuse such confidence "She trusts me fully. She shall never regret it," he said to himself. The consciousness of love and confidence unreservedly given is ennobling to some natures. His cousin's simple trust was a new rock of strength to the young man.

He stooped and kissed the young girl's ruddy lips, and there went from her warm, glowing life and love a thrill of something reciprocal through his being. He loved her, not with the first unreasoning love of the boy throwing his wilful soul into a dream that has come he knows not how—that is beautiful, fascinating, enthralling, he knows not why—but with a riper, better feeling, for those weeks' experience had served to form the young man's character, and it may be that for the time he was even in advance of his years.

He loved his cousin for herself, with a love founded on the sure basis of unwavering respect. He had seen her as she was, and he admired her with all his soul for her beautiful unselfishness. Besides, *she* loved him with a force of loving that only a few weeks before would have been utterly incomprehensible to him. Arthur's suffering had taught him something, and he was able to understand his cousin.

After the mutual revelation they chatted together pleasantly, formed plans by the thousand for Arthur's guidance in the difficult task that was before him and for Adèle's demeanor in his absence. They were as happy as two birds in a nest, for Arthur was at rest in his heart and in his conscience, and in the light of her own happiness and pride Adèle could not even be distressed at the indefinite separation before them. For with the sanguine nature of youth she could not bring herself to believe it would be long.

But as they talked the glow faded from her face. She was still weak, and the glad excitement that had lent so soft a bloom to her cheek for a time was itself exhausting.

Arthur was alarmed as he looked at her, she was so pale and fragile. This friend, whose affection he had almost despised, was becoming infinitely dear to him, and with a sudden pang he thought that perhaps this delicacy might mean more than they had imagined.

"Adèle," he said in a startled tone, leaning over her sofa and gazing anxiously into her eyes, "you must keep nothing from me; remember I am to be your husband. Tell me the whole truth, or I shall go away from you with a haunting fear. Is anything seriously wrong with you? Does the doctor seem alarmed?"

She smiled a glad smile. It was sweet to be so cared for.

"In all honesty I believe not, dear. All I want is change of air. You see I am weak," she sighed, "and all these people coming and going tire me. Oh, Arthur, if you knew how I long for the sea sometimes! It is like a kind of home-sickness. I feel as if I should be well at once if I could only hear the waves Don't you know—that nice, fresh, restful sound?"

"I can't conceive why Aunt Ellen keeps you here," said Arthur with the indignant impatience of youth. A few days before he had not been so boundlessly considerate for his cousin himself. But human nature is ever the same. We would wish all our neighbors to view the landscape from our own standpoint; indeed, we are sometimes highly incensed if they persist in looking at it from theirs.

"Poor mamma!" said Adèle, "she is quite put out and puzzled about me. You see, she never likes to leave London at this time; and then she promised to have Cousin Mary here, and there is so much going on."

"But why need *she* go?" persisted Arthur. "Now, if she would only agree to the arrangement, and if you could stand the journey, I would willingly see you as far as Middlethorpe. Mrs. Grey has plenty of spare room, she would be delighted to see you, and old Martha is travelling there to-day, so that you would be well taken care of; then later in the year Aunt Ellen could pick you up on her way to Scarborough."

Adèle shook her head: "*I* should like it very much, but I fear mamma won't. She will call it one of our unpractical schemes."

"But that's all nonsense," said Arthur impatiently; "she must either take you away herself or let some one else do it, and surely I am as fit a person as any one to decide on what is fitting for my future wife."

Adèle laughed out merrily then, for as the last words were spoken in a tone of indescribable importance, the door opened and Mrs. Churchill appeared, radiant with smiles and good-humor. She had caught the latter part of Arthur's sentence, and its decisive tenor set her mind completely at rest. Evidently these ridiculous young people had at last settled matters to their own satisfaction and hers.

"Treason in the camp!" she said, gayly, repulsing her nephew's offered hand. "No, no, sir; before I have anything whatever to say to you I must hear the burden of your complaint, and understand from your own lips *what* is fitting for your future wife."

"Mamma!" "Aunt Ellen!" Adèle and Arthur were covered with confusion in a moment.

"Blushing, too!" said that lady unpityingly. "Come, Master Arthur, your confusion is becoming, and Adèle's blushes particularly charming, but *I* am not answered. What are your lordship's commands? for I suppose they must be obeyed."

"Must they, Aunt Ellen? *tant mieux*," answered the young man lightly; "then I shall lay them upon you without delay. This young lady"—he took one of Adèle's hands and held it in his—"my future wife, as you observe, is looking wretchedly ill and worn; she requires change of air at once."

Mrs. Churchill's face clouded: "Easily stated, my dear nephew; the difficulty is at the present moment to give it to her."

"The difficulty can easily be overcome, Aunt Ellen, if you will only have confidence in my judgment. You have heard something about Mrs. Grey—"

"And quite enough, Arthur; pray don't begin upon *that* old story."

"But I must, indeed, Aunt Ellen, if you are to understand what I want. Mrs. Grey has been good enough to put all her affairs in my hands. I have learned from her that the separation between herself and her husband was brought about by a misunderstanding which she has been allowed no opportunity of explaining. *My* business now is to find out her husband and make him understand the true state of affairs."

"All very well," broke in Mrs. Churchill impatiently; "and I'm glad to hear she had the good taste and honesty to let you know at least that her husband is living. But, pray, what has this to do with Adèle?"

"Patience for one moment, Aunt Ellen. I only trouble you with all these details that you may know my scheme for my cousin is not so unpractical as it may seem. Mrs. Grey, I am firmly convinced, is an honorable, high-minded lady, or else indeed I could not wish to entrust her, even for one day, with the keeping of any one so near and dear to me as Adèle must be under any circumstances; for (*please* let me go on for one more moment) my scheme is this: Mrs. Grey has a charming little house on the Yorkshire coast; the air is splendid, the neighborhood is quiet."

Mrs. Churchill could not help smiling: "*Don't* take a leaf out of *Murray*, Arthur."

But the young man continued seriously: "She will be delighted to receive Adèle for a time. If you agree to this, I can take her to Middlethorpe before I go abroad, and you, on your way to Scarborough in the autumn, can bring her on with you. Old Martha will be there, for I sent her on to-day with some jewelry belonging to Mrs. Grey which I have reclaimed from her lawyer. You know Martha will look after Adèle's comfort as well as you could. Come now, Aunt Ellen, is this such a very unpractical scheme?"

"Perhaps not, since your Mrs. Grey has turned out to be a respectable matron after all; but what warrant have we that her story is true?"

"Mamma!" began Adèle indignantly, but Arthur stopped her:

"My moral conviction of her truth is enough for me, Aunt Ellen, and for Adèle; I believe it would be for you if you had once seen her. But for your satisfaction I can tell you that her story has been rather strangely confirmed. I went to see Golding about it this morning, for I wished to set him on the track of Mrs. Grey's child, who, I should tell you, was mysteriously stolen away from her about a week ago. He knows Mrs. Grey's solicitor, and had heard from him all the leading points of the story."

Mrs. Churchill sighed: "Ah, well! I hope no harm will come of it. I must say it's a queer state of affairs altogether, but as far as I can see it seems the best plan. Adèle is certainly old enough to take care of herself, and Mrs. Grey could scarcely have any ulterior design in asking her to stay at the house. Then old Mrs. Foster being there is a great thing; she is a most trustworthy person. I suppose it will be necessary for me to write to Mrs. Grey, but how am I to put it? Is she supposed to have sent an invitation by you?"

Adèle's eyes were glistening with delight at this happy termination. "Never mind about that, mamma," she said gayly. "I will write a little note to Margaret to prepare her for my coming, and, let me see, if you like, Arthur, I can start the day after to-morrow."

"My dear child, how impetuous you are!"

"The day after to-morrow, Aunt Ellen," said Arthur decisively; "that will give me to-morrow for further inquiries in town, the day after for our journey, then on the day following, if at all possible, I shall start for the Continent."

"Well, well," said Aunt Ellen, good-humoredly, "you young people have taken the law into your own hands, so all I have to do is to submit."

And thus the matter was arranged to the mutual satisfaction of the cousins.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STORM.

There's somewhat in this world amiss,
Shall be unriddled by and by.

THE sultry afternoon was closed by a stormy evening. As Arthur and Adèle sat together in the library—for Mrs. Churchill, who was herself at a large dinner-party, had been graciously pleased to leave them alone together in this coziest corner of the comfortable house—the clouds began to gather and a moaning, sighing wind to sweep up the street.

"There is going to be a storm," said Adèle with a little shiver; "close the curtains, like a good old fellow, and come to tea."

"Don't you like storms, Adèle? I thought you were so brave."

"Sometimes, but not to-night."

She rose from her seat at the table and stood by his side, leaning her hand on his shoulder and her little rounded chin on her hand.

"How the clouds are driven about, and how wild they look! Oh come away, Arthur. I am so glad I am not alone!"

"Why, my little cousin? Is lightning more dangerous in solitude?"

"Everything *seems* more dangerous when one is alone; but you don't understand me, Arthur. I never feel as if a storm were dangerous. It's not fear, but a kind of feeling rather difficult to explain, as though bad things were about and near us."

"Witches on broomsticks and malignant fairies," suggested Arthur.

Adèle laughed: "Not exactly. I lost my faith in them a few years ago; indeed, by the bye, I never believed in them. My fairies were always pretty and good. This storm makes me think of wicked people more than wicked spirits. There! look! That yellow, sinister-looking flash brought before me as distinctly as if I had seen him at the moment the face of Margaret Grey's tormentor, the tall dark man who smiled in at the window so insolently. Oh, I do hope and trust I shall never meet him anywhere!"

"How funny!" said Arthur lightly: "the storm made me also think of some one connected with Mrs. Grey. That horrid old landlady's face came in a most contorted manner before my mind. I fear that woman is no better than she ought to be; however," he drew out his watch, "if Martha has followed out my directions she ought to be at the cottage now. Let me see: the train is due in York at half-past four, by six she should be at Middlethorpe Station, then a two hours' drive. I hope it is all right, but I can't help wishing I had got the old woman to start last night."

"What are you afraid of, dear?" said Adèle nervously.

Arthur laughed, but there was something forced in his mirth: "We'll draw the curtains, Adèle. You have infected me with your fancies. I really feel as if something uncanny were abroad to-night." They sat down together to the tea-table luxuriously spread with rich plate and china. There were no hot fumes of gas to poison the atmosphere, but a silver reading-lamp cast its warm light upon the table, leaving the heavy crimson curtains in their long folds, the tall stately bookcases and the oaken cabinet in shadow. It was a pleasant room, restful to the senses. Adèle looked round her. "How comfortable we are here to-night, Arthur! and," as a sullen crash of thunder and the splash of falling rain came from outside, "how desolate it must be out there! Oh, Arthur, why can't every one be as happy and comfortable as we are?"

For the sound of the tempest had brought the eternal shadow that lurks in the background of every human joy to the young girl's soul, and she was ready to reproach herself for her own exuberant gladness.

"It's much better not to think of it at all," said Arthur lightly—"at least not to disturb one's self;" and then he added more gravely, "I think if we each do our best to lessen the amount of human suffering, we may safely enjoy our own happiness."

"And you are doing yours," said Adèle, looking admiringly at the young face ennobled by its transient gravity; "if you succeed in bringing back happiness to that *one* life, it will be something to have lived for."

"If I succeed!" Arthur sighed; some of the rebellious thoughts of the preceding evening were troubling him once more. He rose and paced the room. "I feel so restless, Adèle," he said in explanation. "When this storm has cleared off a little I shall go out for a stroll."

Was there a reason for his restlessness? Had some electric current, flashing through the troubled air, notified him of the terrible scene that was being enacted under the storm-sounds in the distant little village, where the woman to whom the first love of his boyhood had been given was, as he fondly believed, resting calmly in her dwelling, cheered by the hope and confidence he had brought her?

Who can tell? for life has many chords, and Nature has agents infinite and varied to work her strange will, and humanity is a complex thing that no philosopher has yet been able to resolve into all its component parts. Matter he may hold, but mind defies him, and these strange coincidences, these half-revelations, are all of the impalpable spirit, humanity's crown and power.

It will be remembered that in the course of the last conversation between Margaret Grey and her young protector he had expressed in very strong terms his distrust of her landlady, and had even hinted some suspicion of her false dealing in the information she had given about the lost child.

That conversation had been overheard by Jane Rodgers. Something of this she had suspected, and with ear applied to the keyhole she had been listening to every syllable of the conversation. Much of it had been inexplicable. It required the disclosures of the morning, which had been given on the seashore utterly out of reach of her ears, to give any meaning to much that passed between Mrs. Grey and her visitor; but this one thing clung to Jane's mind with a sullen persistency.

The young man had seen through her—her lodger distrusted her.

Jane was conscious of this: that she had been guilty of double-dealing, that she had received a bribe for carrying out a certain purpose, that she had given the cunning of a clever brain to helping forward the commission of what she knew to be a crime. And this she had done, not for the money's sake, though Jane was fond of gold, but for the gratification of a hatred which was daily strengthening in her narrow mind. Jane had not many passions or affections; she had, as she thought, outlived the gentler ones, she had grown hard in a hard school; and this hatred had taken all the deeper root. It grew, in fact, till it absorbed her, and drowned in its turbid depths every other emotion.

She had long disliked her mistress—at first she could scarcely have told why. Perhaps it was Mrs. Gray's peculiar beauty and grace and the quiet dignity of her manner that made her so utterly antipathetic to her landlady. Little natures are apt to be jealous in a wild, unreasonable kind of way. Jane in the course of her life as a servant had come often into close contact with beauty, wealth, happiness, but none of these had affected her so strongly as the constant presence of this patient lady, who, she had taught herself to believe, was "no good," and yet whose quiet dignity and calm superiority made her universally respected and admired.

Another element went to the forming of this deadly hatred. Her mistress was kind and gentle, but she never descended to Jane's level. The landlady might think as she would of her lodger's antecedents; there remained in spite of all as immeasurable a distance between them as had ever separated Jane Rodgers the servant from her haughtiest mistress. It was a something that daily fretted the woman's spirit—in a great measure, it may be, because it was incomprehensible.

Jane was no communist or republican; the barriers of rank and fashion she could thoroughly understand. She had never bruised herself by attempting to beat against those iron bars. "Providence," she would piously remark to such of her equals as complained in her presence of inequality of lots—"Providence had ordained as there should be rich and poor, high and low, which, as far as she could see, was judicious, for what would a servant do as a fine lady, and how could a fine lady do for herself?"

But in the refinement that independently of circumstances and surroundings raises one above another, Jane could not see the hand of Providence so directly.

Mrs. Grey seemed to have no particular position in the world, few people knew her, her clothes were often shabbier than Jane's. The landlady believed, and probably with reason, that she could have bought up her mistress's possessions with very little trouble. Where, then, was the difference between them? Why was it that Jane had instinctively stood in the presence of her lodger, and treated her (until the last access of rage and hatred) with the same respect as she had treated mistresses who were high in the scale of the world's honor? She could not understand it, and it galled her proud spirit till dark, brooding evil took full possession of her.

This it was that had prompted her strange behavior in Mrs. Grey's absence. This it was that had caused her last and basest treachery.

Jane had not, indeed, objected to the bribe, which had been tolerably large, but for the money's sake she would not have compromised herself. It was against Jane's principles. That she had gone through life tolerably clean-handed was chiefly owing to this. She had a mind capable of looking beyond the paltry bribe to the consequences involved in its reception. Anxiety of mind, care, terror of discovery,—she was given to comparing the relative value of these with that of the gold which would buy her concurrence in some underhand scheme, and generally the decision was against the gold. But this time the danger of discovery was not great and the service rendered was small, scarcely amounting, so Jane reasoned with herself, to complicity in the deed. The money was acceptable and the revenge was sweet.

It was very bewildering to Jane's mind and rather destructive to her peace that as soon as ever the affair had occured Mrs. Grey's friends came flocking to the place. First the lawyer; but Jane was shrewd enough to see that *he* was not dangerous to her—rather, perhaps, to her mistress. After him, however, came the young Arthur, a man of very different type, and even before the overheard conversation Jane had caught the young man watching her very closely. She knew then that Margaret had told her troubles to a sympathizing listener, who was ready to devote himself to her service. She had a shrewd suspicion, too, that he would succeed in unearthing the mystery. And then her share in the abduction of the child might very possibly come to light.

Her suspicions were confirmed by the few decided words in which Arthur alluded to his fears for Margaret and his earnest desire that she should choose another residence. If they had seen the white look of fear and hatred which overspread the face of the listener, Margaret would probably have come to a very different decision. Jane's hatred had been great before. The penetration of the young man and the quiet acquiescence of her lodger increased it tenfold; while joined to these was a sudden fear lest the salutary advice should be followed, lest Mrs. Grey should leave the house and the schemes of her young protector be carried on wholly out of her reach.

Her fears were set at rest, but Margaret's calm answer inflamed her once more. She read in it a quiet contempt at the bare idea of Jane being able to inflict any kind of annoyance upon her, with the exception of a stupid insolence.

The woman crept from the door with the spirit of evil in her heart. She spent the next day brooding.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT THE STORM BROUGHT.

I said that I was dying. God is good:
The heavens grow darker as they grow the purer;
And both as we do near them; so near death
The soul grows darker and diviner hourly.

THE storm that had looked so wild among the streets and terraces of London broke in absolute fury over the northern ocean. The waves were lashed into violence under the fierce rushing of the winds, the great yellow clouds sent out vivid flashes that lit up the desolate scene, and ever and anon came the sullen crash of thunder through the darkness.

The sun had gone down, the twilight had passed into the storm-darkness; it was about the time when Adèle and Arthur had been discussing the mental effects produced by tempest in the closely-curtained library, and sending out the warm compassion of their young souls to the world's great army of mourners. Margaret Grey sat beside her parlor-window looking out upon the storm. She looked very desolate in the silent, half-dark room, with its white curtains and ghostly holland draperies. Her hands were folded listlessly, her eyes were full of sadness. She had been much happier and far more hopeful since Arthur's visit, but on this evening, she could not have told why, the deep depression from which his presence and her own strenuous exertions had aroused her seemed to be settling down upon her once more.

She felt so absolutely alone and uncared-for in the dreary tumult upon which she gazed that she began to feel as if it were impossible for anything but this to be her lot. Every sweet human tie that had once rejoiced her had been loosened, and she told herself she only was to blame, and therefore they might never, never be reknit. It was a curse upon her, and she could not believe it would be removed.

She bowed her head upon her hands as she thought of the past—as she felt within herself the rich, boundless capabilities of loving—as she looked out upon her own desolation.

And while she was brooding the darkness gathered. In the distance the white foam of the waves gleamed through it, and from time to time it was disturbed by the lightning; but for that it was deep indeed. A dark night has terrors for the imaginative: Margaret looked out with a shudder.

"It was into such a darkness that he went out," she murmured. "Oh, my darling! my darling!"

And then she turned, and began to feel with a certain creeping sense of uneasiness that the house was very still. She drew down the blind with a hasty impulse. The outside world made her think too painfully of that wanderer in his first desolation. Alas! he would have recovered from that—perhaps he was even rejoicing in his liberty. The thought was too bitter. She felt her overstrained mind must have relief. A book might bring it, so she rose to ring for lights.

But before she could reach the bell-handle the door opened slowly, stealthily, as if ashamed of its own creaking, and a figure that in the half darkness she did not recognize crossed to the window, and taking a seat gazed at her across the interval of shadow. There was something defiant in the action, and for a moment Margaret was frightened. Who was this that had dared to intrude upon her?

But she and her landlady were alone in the house. Her fears, she told herself, were puerile; crossing the dark room, she looked her intruder in the face. By the faint light which still struggled through the window-blind she recognized Jane Rodgers. But could she be right? Was not this rather a distorted creature of her own imagination that had taken the landlady's face and features to mock her? This being was very unlike the quiet and eminently respectable landlady, for the face was so livid that it seemed to gleam out of the darkness, the eyes were wild and lurid, and the lips and tongue seemed to be moving convulsively, as though the woman were agitated with burning thirst.

Margaret started back in momentary alarm; but she was naturally brave—she would assure herself that this was no dream conjured up by a diseased imagination, but actual, living flesh and blood. She put her hand on her landlady's shoulder. "Jane," she said, "is this you? My good woman, what is wrong? Has the storm alarmed you?"

Her touch was flung off with such violence that she staggered and nearly fell, for the torrent of this woman's wrath and hatred had been so long suppressed that now no bounds would hold it. "Leave me alone!" she cried. "How dare you put a finger on me? No," with a wild laugh as Margaret retreated quietly to the door. She thought the woman was mad, and so Jane was in a sense. "I've turned the key. We're alone together, at last, my fine lady; you shall hear me out; you shall know what's in my power—what I'll do, by ——! It's a fine night, dark as pitch; a body could be easily put out of the way—made quiet and then tossed out there!"

She lifted the blind, and even as she did so came a lurid flash. It showed the outside tumult, the black, restless waves, seeming in their unrest to hunger for a victim, and for one moment it showed in bold relief what was more dreadful still, a dark human face distorted with hideous passion. The eyes of the landlady seemed to be starting from their sockets, her strong sinewy hands were clenched, her body was stooping forward; the attitude was that of a cat about to spring upon its prey. Margaret saw and shrank back in sudden terror, the sight was so repulsive. But she recovered herself. They were woman to woman. Why should she fear? Again she touched the landlady on the shoulder. "Jane," she said in a low voice that trembled in spite of her strong effort to be calm, "you must be mad or dreaming. What does all this mean?"

"It means ——." The woman hissed *one* word into her ear, and then for the first time Margaret realized her position. She had not much physical strength, for the severe mental struggles through which she had been passing had slowly but surely sapped at the springs of her life. Alone! She had thought of it with sadness only a few moments since; now she felt herself alone, and in the power of a hatred rendered strong and brutal by human passion. In the presence of the dark reality her small remnant of strength deserted her. She felt weak and faint with sheer terror of what might be before her.

In one moment it all seemed to flash upon her—the horror, the mystery, the sickening details. She closed her eyes and instinctively cried out for help to the one Presence that alone was near her in this awful moment. The lightning flashed in again upon the strange scene. It showed her kneeling, with clasped hands and calm face and eyes raised up to heaven.

Heaven! God! We think of them little in our hours of peace and gladness, but in the storm-sounds, in the terrors of darkness, in physical weakness brought home to our souls, perhaps we are all somewhat alike. Weak women and strong, self-dependent men instinctively look up, involuntarily call on the awful name. How often, how often, the Name has proved a Power! Even in this case it seemed for a moment effectual.

The woman with the deadly purpose in her eyes shrank back, awed by the secret witness evoked by prayer. But darkness hid the calm, resolute face, and the cruel heart was steeled once more. "What's the use of praying?" she cried in a transport of fury; "them as prays should practice—

that's *my* creed; and, look you here! if there's a heaven and hell, as the pious says, you've killed my soul, for I was never wicked till *you* came our way; and *curse* you for it, I say, with your milk-white face and your smooth ways and your pride! But I'll do for you yet. I didn't intend it," she continued, her voice rising almost to a shriek, "leastways, not to-night; but the look of you, the feel of you, makes me *mad*." She had seized Margaret's delicate wrists and was holding them in a vice-like grasp as she glared into her eyes. "Your fine young gentleman suspects me—you haven't that confidence. I was insolent, was I? but not nothing to be afraid of. Perhaps you'll cry another cry now, if I let you cry at all."

She laughed a savage laugh that made Margaret shiver, but she had not lost all her power; with a sudden wrench she threw off the woman's grasp, and springing to the window unloosened and opened it. It was on the ground floor, but even a fall would have been better than this life-and-death struggle in the darkness. The cool, keen night-air was refreshing. She drew a long breath and threw herself forward. It was in vain.

Jane had recovered from the momentary paralysis which Margaret's unexpected effort had caused her. She caught her round the waist, and dragging her back into the room threw her down upon the ground.

Then for a moment Margaret's consciousness deserted her. With a deep sigh she closed her eyes, but not even her weakness would come to her relief. Horror kept her senses alert. She opened her eyes to feel the cool night-air bathing her face, and to see the face of her enemy very close to her own.

Jane's knees were on Margaret's chest, her hand was uplifted to strike, but her victim opened her eyes and the hand fell. "You're not quite gone," she said—"only a sham, like t'other night. No more shams for you, fine lady; but, listen! a big one for me, and it'll help your last moments to hear it. You've destroyed yourself is to be my story to-morrow when the neighbors inquire—went out in the storm unbeknown to me—wasn't heard of no more."

Margaret closed her eyes again, but no cry for mercy came from her lips.

Jane Rodgers waited. It would have been a triumph to have heard the passionate prayers for which she had prepared herself to answer with mocking reference to former times. She stooped down. "Have you nothing to say?" she asked.

Still not a word, only the dark eyes opened, and the pure spirit seemed to look out calmly on the passionate, sin-stained mortal.

And still Jane waited. It seemed almost as if an invisible power had held back her hand.

In the moment given her Margaret was preparing to die. She looked her position calmly in the face. She could not struggle. All her strength seemed to have gone out of her in that last effort. Nothing was left but submission. It was hard. For the sake of others, for the sake of the future which was beginning to take fairer colors, she would have wished to live; and then in this kind of death there was something so revolting. To be put out of sight, to be cast like a dog into the waters, to leave behind her as a memory either the stain of self-destruction or the horrible nine days' wonder of a sickening murder. But would not words be thrown away? and strength she had none.

She could only pray with passionate intensity for help. With the prayer came calmness, and after it a strange thought that utterly absorbed her.

For the moment Margaret Grey forgot herself, forgot even the horror of her situation. She looked up into the haggard, desperate face bending over her, and her very soul was filled with a deep, boundless pity. Her thought was no more to save herself; it was to save this woman from the commission of a crime. A sudden sense of responsibility seemed to crush her down, a feeling that if this woman's soul were lost she would be to blame. It was a madness, a noble madness, but it gave her strength.

With an irresistible force she threw off the knees that were pressing out her life, and rising to her feet looked in her turn into the eyes of her bitter foe—a look that so astonished Jane as to render her for the moment helpless, for she saw her mistress's face as the face of an angel. Through the semi-darkness of the room those kind, sad eyes looked into hers, and seemed to draw away half her venom.

Then Margaret spoke in a soft, low tone that contrasted strangely with the fierce, savage words to which she had been forced to listen: "Poor foolish woman! why do you hate me so?"

Her words fell clear and unanswered in the silence. She went on gently, "If I have suspected you wrongfully, if I have caused you any kind of evil, I am heartily sorry; but oh, for your own sake, for the sake of all you hold dear, pause now before you do a deed that can never, through all eternity, be undone."

She paused a moment to gather strength: "I did not intend to ask you to spare me, but as I lay there helpless it came into my mind that if I suffered this deed to be done your blood-guiltiness would be on my head. You cannot hurt me much," she continued with a noble truthfulness, "for what is death? I have looked it in the face more than once—a bitter pang, no doubt, but a short one. I plead not for *my* sake, but for yours—for your poor soul, which is perishing this night. In God's name I beseech you to spare it. Be wise in time, or at least—for the long night is before us—take an hour to consider. I will not escape—I will sit here in your sight. You were mad for the moment—these feelings of hatred had taken possession of you—God would not suffer—" She broke off suddenly, "Hark! what is that?"

"A knocking at the gate," said Jane, turning very pale. "Now's your time. You have gained time with your false tongue. I sha'n't be able to escape. You will have your revenge."

"Stop," said Margaret, holding her back, and there was heavenly forgiveness in her face. "Believe that I wish you no ill. Look at me, Jane. Do you see hatred or vengeance in my face? Forget these few awful moments. I will forgive, and we shall both thank God for ever for having saved us from an unspeakable horror. This is His hand; go down on your knees and thank Him."

"It is—it is!" said Jane, shivering, for her superstitious nature had been touched by the strange coincidence. Governed by a stronger will than her own, she knelt, while the tears rained down her face.

But the knocking began to grow desperate.

"You had better go," said Margaret quietly; "our visitor is impatient."

Obedient as a child, the woman who but a few moments before had been foaming with rage got up and went out. The cause of the noise was soon explained. A chaise was standing at the gate, the sound of whose approach had been unheard in the tumult of the night: an elderly woman had dismounted.

"Sae ye're not all deed and buried," she said briskly as the landlady showed her scared face at the gate. "I was rating the laddie here for misguiding o' an auld wife that micht hae bin his mither, for, thinks I to myself, sure and certain there's not a soul within, and a awfu' nicht it is to keep a body outside"—the old woman spoke quite reproachfully—"but noo I think on't," she continued, "ye're not living here your lane. One Mrs. Grey is lodgin' wi' you, for, as I tak it, you're the landleddy."

Jane was scarcely able to speak, but as silence gives consent the old woman proceeded to pay the boy, to gather up her parcels and to walk rapidly along the garden-path.

"An' here *is* Mrs. Grey her ainsel', as I canna doobt," she continued cheerfully, for Margaret had lighted the hall-lamp and was standing underneath it.

The old Scotchwoman looked round her scrutinizingly as she passed into the lighted hall. There was a certain appearance of repressed excitement about both Margaret and the landlady that did not escape her shrewd old eyes. "Bless me, how wild they look!" was her mental ejaculation, but she refrained from all expression of her feelings.

Mrs. Foster understood her manners. She prided herself on this, that she knew a lady the moment she set her eyes upon her. Whatever Mrs. Grey might turn out to be, old Martha was satisfied at once that she was a lady, and she acted accordingly. She dropped a little old-fashioned curtsey, and the excitement of her first arrival having in a measure passed, brought forward her best English to do honor to the occasion:

"You'll be astonished, madam, and with reason, to see an old woman drop down from the skies, as we may say, and at this hour of the night, too. But I've brought my credentials with me, and, like mony anither, my young gentleman likes to do everything in a hurry. Here's the letter which will explain a sight better than I can."

"Come in, come in," said Margaret; then to Jane, who was looking at her in a strange scrutinizing manner, "Bring the candles into the parlor, Jane; then come in and consider how we are to provide for our guest. I am sure she is heartily welcome, for I see Mr. Forrest has sent her."

Margaret's words had the desired effect. They set Jane's mind at rest. She saw it was not her mistress's intention to make any revelation about the scene that had preceded the old woman's arrival. Bewildered and dazed, she found her way to the kitchen, mechanically did as she was told, and returned to the parlor to find the old woman quietly divesting herself of bonnet and shawl and looking round with the air of one who had taken possession.

Old Martha seemed in fact to be the only capable person in the house, for Margaret had fallen back on the sofa white and trembling. Up to the moment of the old woman's arrival she had been sustained by her overpowering excitement. In the pleasant, warm security she began to feel a certain reaction, a sudden collapse of power.

And the landlady, notwithstanding her vigorous efforts to recover her self-possession, looked rather scared. It was such a contrast—from the horror and darkness to the light and pleasant security. But our life is strange; the common things seize and silence the dramatic crises, and we drop naturally into the old channels. The first access of alarm over, Jane Rodgers put on her apron, smoothed back her hair and set about the common tasks of relighting the kitchen fire, preparing tea and airing sheets for the old woman's bed, just as if that awful night's experience had never been. And Margaret swallowed a glass of wine, fought down her longing for tears, and found herself in a few moments looking with tranquil pleasure at her old treasures, the rings and bracelets which Martha Foster had returned, and listening quietly to the old woman's lively description of Mr. Arthur's babyhood and early youth. Martha never imagined this could be anything but interesting, and to have begun so soon on her pet subject was a high mark of the old woman's favor.

Margaret believed she had conquered Jane Rodgers's fierce hatred—for the moment at least—yet it was with a feeling of devout thankfulness that she noticed how, of her own accord, the landlady had arranged for Martha Foster to sleep in the little closet which opened from her bedroom.

They all retired early, and the stormy evening closed in peace.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

> Oh, trust me, never fell
> By love a spirit or earthly or of heaven:
> Rather by love they are regenerate.
> Love is the happy privilege of mind—
> Love is the reason of all living things.

MARGARET'S work was not over. In that transcendent moment when death was staring her in the face she had made a certain resolution, and the security that followed the danger did not make her shrink from carrying it out. Strange but true; the words in which she had striven with the desperate spirit of evil that had taken possession of Jane Rodgers actually represented her state of mind at the time. Margaret had thrown herself out of herself. With the renovating power of the intensest pity she had looked into the troubled spirit which was revealing itself in all its unutterable depths of misery, and she had resolved to save it even from itself. Hence it was that instead of the abject cries self-pity would have drawn from the proudest heart at this supreme crisis, her words had been calm, self-contained, spoken with an authority which to the half-crazed brain of the desperate woman was so strange as to seem mysterious and supernatural.

This it was that had saved Margaret at least from severe bodily harm. In sheer astonishment the woman's hand had been stayed, and before the wicked impulse could return help was at the door. The help had come so strangely that Jane's superstitious fears were confirmed. She began to think her mistress possessed some secret power. The idea cowed her. She became abject in her dread. She looked upon the woman she had injured as one surrounded by invisible protectors, ready at a moment's notice to come to her assistance.

Even on that first evening Margaret had read a part at least of this in her landlady's face. The sullen frown did not leave Jane's brow, but the defiance had gone. It was a change for the better, yet Margaret was not satisfied; she wanted more than this. She had felt on that night like one in actual contact with the wild powers of darkness, struggling at the very mouth of the bottomless pit for a lost soul; and the impression continued. With the perseverance of a dominant idea that haunts the mind it followed her through her sleep. She seemed to hear the despairing cries of a dying soul; she seemed to see the mocking smiles of fiends who were waiting, like the vultures of the sandy wastes, till the last convulsive throes should be over to claim the lost thing for their own; she seemed to feel the last speechless agony, the outer darkness of despair.

Once she awoke, for the oppression was choking her, and when the waking reality of the dream came back in all its fulness she rose and knelt by her bed. "Thou hast saved *me*, my God," she prayed; "give *me* the power of saving, of helping to salvation, this wandering spirit." After that she was calmer; she was able to lie and watch, as she scarcely cared to sleep again, for the breaking of the morning, and to think and plan about the best method of carrying out her noble work.

"Love is the antidote of hatred," thought Margaret; "I will teach this woman to love, and perhaps love may be a ladder of life to her soul."

The morning broke slowly. She threw open her window and watched how it spread itself over sea and sky. Then there was a stir in the village. Windows and doors were opened, carts began to move heavily in the streets, and the steps of passing laborers could be distinctly heard.

Margaret bowed her head upon her hand. "They come from homes," she murmured; "they will go back to them to-night. My home is not."

But a rosy light spread itself over the sea; the waves that were rolling steadily in to the shore caught on their rebound a glow as of sapphire. It was the sun, and the sun brought hope. Then came movement in the house; it showed that Jane was astir. Margaret's mind went back to its planning. After a few moments' thought she wrapped her dressing-gown round her and crept on tip-toe to the door of the room where Martha Foster slept. The old woman was sleeping the sleep of the righteous. Margaret closed the door of communication and then she rang the bell. Before her landlady could harden her heart against her Margaret wished to make some impression. While the scene of the past night was still fresh in her mind she might be more ready to hear the words of love and forgiveness Margaret had prepared herself to utter.

Some minutes passed before Jane appeared. She was at a loss to imagine what the object of her mistress could be. Jane had awoke that morning like one who has been under the power of a fearful nightmare. She could scarcely believe at first that she *was* herself, and that she was actually free from crime. But when she did, she felt for the first time in her life an emotion of earnest thankfulness to the Power, visible or invisible, which had withheld her hand.

For Jane had always been a prudent woman. As a general rule her passions had been kept in check by some stronger motive-power. Cupidity, self-love, interest, a strong desire for that paradise of a certain class, respectability and independence, keen common sense that showed the folly of a momentary gratification of passion, followed by a life-long repentance,—these had hitherto kept her from all the grosser forms of sin.

But this time they had all been too weak. The hatred had been nourished in her heart till it had grown into a master-passion; fear of her treachery being discovered, indignation and disgust at the new happiness that seemed to be opening out before the object of her hatred, had added their fearful impulse to her heated soul, and then came the storm, the darkness, the opportunity.

In the cool clear morning Jane shuddered. If she had carried out her dark purpose, what would she have been that morning? In all probability a hunted criminal. She was thankful for her escape, but not yet truly penitent for the sin. The soul from which one baffled demon has been banished is ready for the seven if it be not occupied and filled with some better guest.

Jane obeyed Margaret's call after a few moments' delay. She knocked at the bedroom door, opened it and stood on the threshold, a quiet, respectable-looking person, but there was a sullen frown on her brow. "Did you please to want anything, ma'am?" she asked. Her broom was in her hand—a hint, as it were, that she was in no mood to be delayed.

"Only to speak to you, Jane," said Margaret. "Come here; Mrs. Foster seems to be fast asleep and I have shut the door, or if you like I can speak to you in the next room, but we may not have so good an opportunity again."

Jane looked down: "What might you wish to say to me, ma'am?"

There was a forced unconcern in her manner that was not particularly encouraging, but Margaret would not despair. She held out her hand with a smile: "I fear you distrust me, Jane. Why," she continued in a tone of such deep sadness that the landlady's heart, in spite of herself, was touched—"why will you persist in being my enemy? God is my witness that I would do you good."

"You ain't got nothing to do with me," said Jane, in a stifled voice. "If I choose to go to the bad, what's that to you or anybody else? I won't try to hurt *you* again, if that's what you want to know, and only that I was mad I wouldn't have done it last night."

"I know you were mad—I felt it then; and then I resolved that I would save you from yourself. You are mistaken, my poor woman; it is much, very much, to me, whether, as you express it, you go to the bad. Jane, I believe it has been given to me to save you, and, God helping me, I will do it."

She spoke with a quiet determination that had marvellous power. Her dream was with her once more. She seemed to see the wild, unholy tumult; she seemed to be holding, clinging to the wretched life that death in death was swallowing up.

And Jane watched her with a curious emotion, very strange and utterly incomprehensible to herself.

The hard, selfish side of life had chiefly presented itself to the landlady, both as regarded her own nature and the nature of those with whom she had come into contact. This divine self-forgetfulness, this pure love of the erring even because of its miserable errors, was something so new as to be a kind of revelation to her soul. A good she had conceived impossible seemed to be opening itself out as not only possible, but real. And the revelation had a renovating power. There came over her a remembrance of the time when she had been "joyful and free from blame."

It brought a sudden softness to her heart. But she would not give way to it. She seized her broom and half turned, so as to hide her face from Margaret's gaze. "What's the use of talking?" she said in a stifled voice; "talking won't make me no better. I hated you; why can't you hate me and be done with it?"

"Because I do *not* hate you, Jane; because, on the contrary, my soul is filled with earnest longing for your good. It came to me here in last night's darkness as I thought of your words that perhaps I had given some cause for these feelings of yours. I have wrapped myself up in my own sorrows and have neglected to enter with a woman's sympathy into your troubles and joys. For—I know it—we must not and cannot live to ourselves. Selfishness brings its own punishment."

Jane looked down: "I have no troubles in particular, not to interest anybody but—"

It had come over her in an irresistible flood, the remembrance of her *one* happy time. Ah! it is a great fact, mysterious but true—misery and hopeless wretchedness make half the criminals that fill our jails, that prowl undetected about our streets. To the happy goodness is easy.

Jane broke down suddenly, and throwing herself on her knees buried her face in the bed-clothes: "If *he* had been true to me I'd have been another woman. Oh! God was cruel. I was getting soft when he was coming and going with his pleasant ways: it was too short—" Her voice was choked with sobs. "I've been bad—bad from that day. I'm getting worse, and God has left me. What'll I do? what'll I do?"

Margaret's eyes filled with tears. She stooped down and drawing one of the woman's reluctant hands from the hidden face, held it in her own.

"I thought so," she said gently, as if speaking to herself.

"there is always a background." Then to the weeping woman: "Think of it—you and I, my poor Jane, living here together, and shutting up our troubles in our own hearts. No wonder we grew hard and selfish. But it is over, is it not? You will help me to bear, and I will teach you to love. This is what you want to take you out of yourself. Look up, Jane; be of good courage."

But she only wept the more bitterly. "I can't," she said; "my heart is like stone."

Margaret touched the heated face with cool, soft fingers. "What do these tears mean?" she said gently. "They come from a heart that is becoming soft, if it is not soft already. Yes, I feel it too. We ought to be drawn out of ourselves. It is necessary to our happiness, to the healhty life of our souls. We grow morbid here in our solitude, with our thoughts toward inward. Since my darling little one was taken from me I too have been getting hard, Jane, or perhaps you and I might have understood each other better. But I thank God there is still time before us. You must let me into the secrets of your life. I will tell you what my sufferings have been, that there may be a true sympathy between us; then we must look out from our own sorrows to the great world of suffering around us, and whether the future bring happiness or grief, it need not be altogether bereft of the treasures of love and sympathy."

Jane listened, and her tears ceased. The words of Margaret were like oil on the troubled waters. They brought hope, they suggested possible comfort in a future that but a few moments before had been black with the utter blackness of despair.

For humanity is not ever entirely bad. I think no living, breathing creature can be said to be hopelessly depraved. Sin, it is said, brings its own punishment, but the heaviest punishment sin can bring is the agonizing suffering it inflicts upon the soul. To be without hope of that beautiful attribute we call goodness would be misery unimaginable.

Yet this was what Jane had been feeling that morning, and Margaret's words were like rays of light pointing to a possible redemption. "If I'd aught in the whole world to care about," she said, "I'd try and be better, but—"

And then she stopped suddenly, for Jane was eminently practical, and an idea had flashed in upon her brain.

"Have you no friends?" asked Margaret.

"I was thinking of the child," she said.

"What child?"

"He married my young sister," she answered, speaking slowly and with apparent difficulty, "and I hated him and her too; but afterward I was glad, for he treated her bad. She died of a broken heart, they say. I never went nigh her, though she sent to beg me hard. That's three years agone next Whitsuntide. They had three or four children; all died but one, a boy two years old when sister died. The father, he went off, no one knows where, and Willie—that's his name, they say—was put in the workhouse. I seen him once"—her voice grew broken again—"a fine little chap, like his father, and for a bit I felt inclined to bring him home, but that look of his made me hard and I came away."

Margaret smiled a brooding, motherly smile: "God is good to you, Jane. He has not left you, as you said. He has given you little Willie. You must find him, and I think he will soon teach you to love."

Jane had almost forgotten, in the new sweetness of speaking about her own feelings, to whom she had been addressing herself. Margaret's words reminded her, and she was struck with a sudden sense of wonder, almost of awe.

"Why do you care for me?" she said in a low tone. "I've insulted you, I've acted wrong by you, I've tried to do you a mischief, and you listen to me, you take an interest that nobody ever did before, and you're not afraid of me, either," she continued confusedly. "There's them, I believe, as won't allow a hair of your head to fall. There must be a reason for it."

"Only the reason that I told you, Jane. I want to save you from yourself; but Mrs. Foster is moving, and I don't wish our conversation to be overheard. I must hear more about little Willie at another time." She held out her hand: "We are friends, are we not?"

Jane took it in an awkward, bewildered kind of way. Then, as she looked into her mistress's face and read nothing but forgiveness there, her feelings became quite too much for her. Throwing her apron over her head, she rushed out of the room crying like a little child. For the spirit of a little child had come into the hard heart.

Her night had been dark as pitch, but already the fair dawning had gleamed out of the east.

CHAPTER XIX.

GOOD-NIGHT AND GOOD-BYE.

> Behold in yon skies
> This wild night is passing away while I speak.
> Lo! above us the day-spring beginning to break!
> Something wakens within me, and warms to the beam.
> Is it hope that awakens?

"My bairn was unco' fashed aboot naething," said Nurse Martha to herself as she trotted about the cottage that day, trying to be very busy, but finding the process hard.

The fact was this: Martha was considerably perplexed. She had been sent to Middlethorpe because her young master was anxious about this lady, in whom he had taken so deep an interest; he had given the old woman as a reason for his anxiety that he had a strong suspicion about her landlady—the only other person in the house—believing her to be not only an untrustworthy person, but specially antagonistic to Mrs. Grey.

Martha Foster had been requested to watch this person. She *had* watched, and what had she found out? Only an almost superfluous devotion on Jane Rodgers's part.

Through the whole of that day Mrs. Grey had been suffering from a kind of nervous depression. The thoughtful kindness of her attendant, which seemed to be offered as a tribute of affection, could not possibly be exceeded. Nothing was left for Martha to do. The landlady was even inclined to resent her interference in any personal attendance on Mrs Grey.

Her cold, quiet way of saying that, having known Mrs. Grey some time, it was only natural she should understand her ways better than a stranger, quite surprised the old woman.

"Gang yer ain gait, my gude woman," she had answered. "I'm blithe to hear ye ken your wark and love yer bonny leddy sae weel."

And then the landlady had looked at her with a kind of suspicion. Turning away, she had said in a low, constrained voice, "I should love her if any one should."

What, perhaps, appeared still more mysterious to Nurse Martha was that Mrs. Grey seemed thoroughly to understand, and even to return, the feelings her landlady cherished for her.

When she was at her worst—and in the early part of the day the pain in her head had been maddening—she could look up with a smile that was almost one of pleasure at the anxious, hard-featured face leaning over her, and receive with a sweet gratitude services which to the old woman, experienced in nursing, seemed unnecessary and obtrusive.

The landlady and her lodger appeared, in fact, to understand each other so perfectly that in the evening Mrs. Foster began to think herself *de trop*. Not that Mrs. Grey was anything but most kind and hospitable; she was even too grateful for her obedience to her young gentleman's wishes; but there was nothing for her to do. Jane kept her house in excellent order, and certainly, as far as Mrs. Grey's personal requirements went, it did not seem as if she could have a more devoted attendant.

Mrs. Foster made up her mind to write to her young master and point out to him that her further presence would be unnecessary. But the next morning brought a change. There were two letters—one for Margaret and one for the old woman. Adèle and Arthur had both written to announce the pleasing fact of their arrival.

Margaret was in bed when her letters came, but the sight of them revived her. Her new champion was more active than the lawyer; he had news, Adèle said, and he would bring it. For although the strange events of the last few days had had the effect of dividing Margaret's thoughts in a measure, yet this was still her one haunting desire—to see Maurice once more, to let him at least hear of her, to have him know that she was faithful to him in heart and conscience. Even the recovery of her child was second to that.

"They will be here this evening," she said to old Martha, her face radiant with hope. "I wish the evening were here."

And the old woman wondered, thinking within herself that this eagerness was rather suspicious.

But further remarks were stopped by a knock at the door. The landlady was there holding a fair-haired child by the hand. "Excuse me, ma'am," she said in that constrained tone which was always a puzzle to Martha; "but I thought you might perhaps like to see my nephew."

A light which was very like most unfeigned joy spread itself over Margaret's face. "Bring him to me, Jane," she said softly. "There, put him up on the bed; he won't be frightened." For the child was looking round bewildered at the strangeness of the scene.

"He's not properly dressed," said the woman falteringly.

Willie still wore the coarse workhouse suit, but his fair skin was as white as snow, and his yellow curls might have been the pride of any mother's heart.

"Never mind his clothes. Give him to me for one moment," said Margaret pleadingly.

"If you really wish it, ma'am," said Jane, and her harsh voice was husky, but she stooped over the child, and no one knew that the cold, gray eyes were dim with tears.

"So this is little Willie?" said Margaret, passing her hand caressingly over his curls, while the child looked up with blue eyes of wonder. "Should you like to live with us, dear?" she said, in her soft motherly voice.

The little boy had never taken his eyes from her face. "Stay wid you," he replied decisively.

"So you shall," said Margaret smiling; and then to his aunt, "I have some little things that will almost fit him, Jane. My child's frocks and petticoats two or three years ago would suit Willie very well. We could alter them a little, and you might easily get a belt of some kind in the village to keep him from looking too much like a girl."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Jane. She could not have spoken another word.

"How pleasant!" said Margaret almost gleefully. "I wanted something to help me to pass the tiresome hours of this long day, and now my pretty little Willie has come, and we must help him into prettier clothes. Come, Mrs. Foster you know all about little ones. We must press you into the service."

"Willingly," said the old woman, producing a monstrous thimble from her pocket and popping it on her finger. And soon, united by the pleasant mutual interest, even awkwardness was forgotten among the three women as they worked together with a will to clothe the little one suitably. They were all benefited: Martha had found an occupation, and she began dimly to understand Mrs. Grey's tactics; Margaret was happy in seeing the fruits of her efforts come even more fully than she could have hoped; and Jane felt all the hardness melting away from her heart. Mrs. Grey insisted she should join them in the afternoon to give her advice and assistance in the serious task of changing a girl's clothes into a boy's, but once or twice she was forced to make her escape. These outbursts of feeling, however, made her better. They taught her that she was not all bad. They showed her that in the heart she had thought past redemption were yet the seeds of good; and unconsciously she rejoiced, blessing the kindly hand which out of misery and blackness had brought light, and even a measure of peace.

The day passed rapidly in this pleasant work, but Willie had long been asleep before the welcome sound of wheels notified the approach of the travellers.

The cottage and its surroundings certainly presented a more smiling appearance than on the preceding evening. Indeed, the contrast could not have been greater, for this was a kind of gala, and Jane Rodgers, in deference to the wishes of her mistress, determined nothing should be wanting that could produce a pleasing impression on the mind of the visitor.

Jane was not, and never could be, a person of many words. She was naturally self-contained. The business of preparation, from which she spared neither labor nor thought, was a kind of outlet for the feelings which could not find expression in words. If she could say nothing about her gratitude, she would prove it.

She knew Margaret's love of flowers, so she had gathered them together from every available corner. Roses, geraniums, fragrant heliotrope and mignonette were literally scattered in the rooms, which were full of an abundance of light. Some of Jane's cherished savings had been expended in plants that lined the hall and peeped from the windows. The cottage, indeed, looked very pleasant. The front door, thrown wide open, showed the lighted hall, and even allowed a glimpse of the small sitting-room, in which a substantial tea-table, spread with all kinds of dainties and decorated with Jane's wealth of plate and china, seemed to invite the entrance of the weary travellers. Outside was the moon, throwing its white beams on the little plot of grass as it shone persistently through the branches of the stately cedar which flanked the little house on one side, while through the fragrant limes on the other side came the glimmer of the starlit sea.

"How pretty and quiet it all looks!" said Adèle to her cousin as they approached the cottage. "And that's the place, I feel sure; it is just what I expected to see. Now I know I shall get well soon."

She leant back in the carriage with a little sigh, for Arthur was paying scarcely any attention to her words. She could see his face in the moonlight rapt and eager, and Adèle felt almost sick for a moment with the longing that *she* might ever be able to call that look into his face. He turned to her at last. "It is all right," he said in a tone of intense relief; "I see her."

Adèle looked at him in simple wonder: "And whom did you expect to see, Arthur?"

Arthur turned away in slight confusion. He did not wish Adèle to know that the kind of uneasiness aroused by the storm had never left his mind—that he had been haunted by a certain inexplicable fear which nothing but the sight of Margaret herself could take away. He did not answer Adèle's question, but proceeded to gather together the bags and parcels.

The landlady was at the gate, with curtseyed welcome, ready for any consignment; Margaret was on the steps of the front door; the old woman was behind her. Arthur for the first few moments had to be contented with her and with a nod and a smile from Margaret, whose warmest welcome was for Adèle. "Come in, come in," she said, holding out both her hands; "I thought it almost too good to be true when I read your letter this morning. But you have come, my poor, pale child, and we must take care of you and make you strong." She drew her into her own room: "Will you share this with me for the present, dear? I can look after you better so."

Adèle was weak and tired. She could scarcely keep from tears as she threw her arms round Margaret's neck in her impulsive girlishness. "I am so glad to come," she said. "And oh! I wanted to thank you!" Adèle was thinking of the little scene in the library.

"Thank me, dear!" replied Margaret, gently removing the young girl's hat as she spoke, and smoothing back her hair with a loving hand. "What shall I say to you, then, my faithful friend, who has believed in me through everything?" She spoke lightly, but there was an undertone of deep emotion in her voice. "We shall have plenty to talk about, Adèle, but this evening is to be given to rejoicing. I feel as if it were the opening of a new era in our lives—as if happiness, that capricious little deity, were hiding somewhere very near us. Come into the dining-room; your cousin will become impatient if we shut ourselves up *too* long."

They went together into the little parlor; and when Arthur saw Adèle's glistening eyes and noted Margaret's loving little attentions to her guest, he felt sorely inclined once more to be jealous of his cousin; but he did not allow this to be seen, and the evening passed away very happily. Harmony, that sweet, rare guest, seemed to reign in the little household. Every one was comfortable and happy. The undisguised satisfaction of the old woman, who began dimly to see through some of the mysteries that had been perplexing her; the happiness of Adèle, wavering between smiles and tears, and taking a final refuge in the former; the confidence and peace which seemed for the moment to have taken possession of Margaret; Arthur's apparent contentment and overflowing merriment; the quiet, respectful attentions of the landlady,—made a pleasing whole.

When the tea-things were cleared away, and Jane and Martha had finally retired for a gossip in the kitchen, Arthur got up and closed the door with great care. "Now, Mrs. Grey," he said, crossing over to where she sat looking out upon the moonlight, "I must really have it out with you. Are you a magician? *Please* give us the secret of your power?"

Margaret smiled: "A serious accusation, Sir Knight. Before committing myself in any way, I must hear upon what it is founded."

"You have bewitched that wretched old landlady of yours. Why, I declare I never in my life saw the like of it. When I was last here I felt once or twice an insane desire to say something that would astonish her, I was so angry at the cool impertinence of her manner. Now, good gracious! no humble slavey could be more obsequious. She seems actually affectionate—has the appearance of a devoted family servant. What have you done to arouse enthusiasm? Come, Mrs. Grey, confess!"

"You must confess, first," answered Mrs. Grey, more gravely, it seemed, than the occasion warranted, "that such a thing is possible as to be mistaken, even when we think our observation has been of the keenest. You thought and I thought that Jane Rodgers was wholly without a heart. I have discovered my mistake, and found a way to her heart; that is all the mystery. Thank you, a thousand times, for your kind thoughtfulness in sending Mrs. Foster. She is a charming old woman, and I was delighted to receive her, but my landlady and I are perfectly *d'accord*."

Arthur shrugged his shoulders: "The mystery remains a mystery still, however; even in her changed attitude your landlady is not a lively subject, to me especially, for she was the cause of a severe nightmare which kept me awake for hours only a very short time ago. We'll change it. What I want to tell you is, that all being well I start for Moscow to-morrow night."

Margaret clasped her hands and looked straight before her into the night. "Then you have heard of him?" she said in a low voice.

"I have heard something, dear Mrs. Grey." Arthur spoke slowly, a certain sadness in his voice. It was as it should be. She loved her husband. He was nothing to her but an intermediary, an instrument. "But do not raise your hopes too high," he continued. "It may be a long and tedious business. The last address given by Mr. Grey to his solicitor—who, I suppose you know, is not the same as yours—for letters and remittances, was that of an agent in Moscow. It is more than probable he has left that place himself. He seemed to wish to keep his ultimate destination a secret. I shall go to Moscow myself, and see this agent. He will probably be able to give me some information."

"And what if he refuse?"

"I have a key. Russians are proverbially open to bribery and corruption."

Margaret shivered a little: "It seems almost wrong, but I can't help it. Oh, if I only knew!"

"We are working for him as well as for you," said Arthur quietly. He felt for the moment an insane inclination to do something desperate to this "*him*" for whom he was working so disinterestedly. For Margaret looked more beautiful than ever—at least he thought so as she sat there in the moonlight. The young man in his boyish enthusiasm could have fallen before her, and, holding her feet, have worshipped her. But she was so utterly unconscious. Adèle meanwhile was lying on the sofa, listening and watching. She was trying to acquiesce in it all, trying to feel it right that her Arthur should take so deep an interest in another woman—for she knew his face well, she had read that sudden longing—she was trying to rejoice in Margaret's unconsciousness and her cousin's truth; but the little aching was at her heart. Margaret had been, for the moment, absorbed in her own hopes and fears; as Arthur spoke the last words, however, she thought suddenly of Adèle, and crossing to the sofa she sat down by her side.

"Forgive me," she said softly.

"What for, Mrs. Grey?"

Adèle lifted her eyes to her friend's face, and Margaret saw that tears were not far off.

"For sending *your* Arthur away on this wild search," she whispered. And Arthur, who had been standing at the window gazing regretfully at the stars, and thinking with some discontent of life's contradictions, heard what she said. The words were like a reproach. They made him think of Adèle's self-forgetfulness; they brought back to him the gentle scene of that stormy night.

He turned resolutely from the window, and placing himself at the head of the sofa looked down upon his cousin's young fair face. She put out her hand with a smile; he took it and held it in both his own. "She is not to be pitied, Mrs. Grey," he said lightly, "for this is all her own doing. I am only obeying, like a faithful knight, the orders of my liege lady. She filled my mind with her grand poetic ideas about doing good, and the rest of it; she was always making me ashamed of my idle, aimless life; then after we first met you, and she and I had made up our minds you had some great sorrow, she tried to bring me near to you; and finally, the other day, when, as I told you, part of your history came to us, she sent me off to see you and find out the truth; her orders were—Shall I repeat them, Adèle?"

He had succeeded in making her pale cheeks a "celestial rosy red."

"You have said quite enough, dear, and too much. Have you discovered, Mrs. Grey, that my cousin is rather given to exaggeration?"

"Am I to believe all this is exaggeration?" replied Margaret. And then she stooped and kissed the young girl's glowing face. "It is so very like the truth, Adèle, that you must allow me the happiness of believing it. I shall take the services of your knight as your gift, and we shall watch together for his safe return."

"And remember, Adèle," said Arthur impressively, "no flirting in my absence. Mrs. Grey, I shall make you responsible."

Margaret laughed, and Adèle answered gayly, for her bright spirits were rapidly returning, "Pray, sir, with what am I to flirt? As far as I can see already, there are no objects but stones and waves, and I fear that on them my fascinations would be thrown away. Mrs. Grey, have you many visitors in this place in the summer?"

"Principally nurses and babies; I fear it will be dull for you."

"Dull!" said Adèle rapturously, "with you and the sea! Why, this is the kind of dulness I have been craving for. If you only knew how delightful it is to escape from soirées and dinner-parties, and, more hateful still, afternoon callers! But have you nothing else to tell Mrs. Grey, Arthur?"

"Very little more, Adèle. I think I told you, Mrs. Grey, that we had traced your little girl to Southampton. We sent an agent there, and to-day my solicitor, Golding, had a telegram from him. Travellers answering exactly to our description seem to have taken tickets to Paris. A sailor in one of the steam-packets remembers the child perfectly. He seems to have been struck with her beauty and the peculiar appearance of her companion. Paris is a large city, but I do not despair. Our man has his wits about him. We have communicated with the French police too, and they are on the alert."

Margaret sighed: "It is *so* difficult to be patient. I long to be off myself—my poor little darling!—but I suppose it would be useless."

"Worse than useless. You see we must proceed with great caution, and the man we suspect knows you. If he found out that you were personally on the track, he might take alarm and hide the child; but our agent is unknown to him. By the bye, have you a picture or anything of the kind of either or of both of them, your little Laura and this foreigner? If you have it may be useful."

Margaret turned pale: "Wait a moment," she said. She went with her candle into the next room, and opening a drawer took from it a little old leather box. The key was on her watch-chain, but her hand trembled as she fitted it into the lock. The lid flew open, revealing a little velvet-lined case, which seemed to contain only two or three yellow envelopes, a withered flower and two likenesses.

Sitting down, Margaret leant her head upon her hand, and two or three tears fell into the box. It was like the opening of a grave. The likenesses were miniatures, delicately painted and set in gold. She took up the one that lay uppermost, and looked at it through a mist of blinding tears. It was the portrait of a young girl; the face was not so beautiful as that which looked down upon it, for the features were irregular, but the artist had hit happily upon its principal charm: it was in the eyes, which were dark and lustrous, and in the low, broad brow, from which the hair swept back in soft waving lines.

"My Laura," said Margaret half aloud, "forgive me—he is unworthy."

She laid down the miniature softly, and taking up the other looked at it silently, then turning it she touched a clasp at the back. Between the gold and the ivory lay a scrap of yellow paper. With a sudden impulse she crushed it in her hand, then smoothing it out carefully she read it by the candlelight. The words written were few and simple: "A Mddles. Marguerite et Laure, des amitiés bien sincères—L'ESTRANGE;' but the strong man's hand that had traced them had trembled visibly, and as the woman whose dignity he had outraged, whose treasure, as she believed, he had stolen, looked on them that night, she remembered how her heart had warmed at the thought of those trembling fingers, and of what that trembling told.

It was not this, however, that brought the softness to her face at that moment. Slowly she put down the paper and the opened miniature; taking up the other, she held it against her heart. "Laura, my darling, forgive me!" she murmured; "I would have kept your treasure; I cannot." With the other hand she took the piece of yellow paper and held it in the flames till it was consumed. Then replacing the first miniature, she shut and locked the box, put it back in its place with scrupulous care, and returned to Adèle and Arthur.

There was no trace of agitation in Margaret's manner as she held out the miniature.

"This was a common treasure of my cousin's and mine," she said with a sad smile. "I kept it only in obedience to her dying wishes, but I must find my child, and my poor Laura would forgive me."

Arthur took it. "I think you are right," he said; "but about your child?"

"I have plenty of likenesses of her. You had better take the last; it is wonderfully good: I have never seen a better photograph of a child. But, Arthur, before you send this miniature away, look at it carefully; *you* may possibly come across them."

"If I do—!" said Arthur from between his clenched teeth.

Margaret laid her hand on his arm and looked at him anxiously: "You would do nothing rash, I hope, Arthur; you know my history; you will be able to understand me when I say that for the sake of those old days, for my darling's memory, I would not have a hair of his head touched. I only want my child."

"Be of good courage," said Arthur cheerily; "if she is in the land of the living, we shall find her, Mrs. Grey, and bring her back to you in triumph. Thank you for these; they will be of great use to us. But now, ladies, it is getting late, and I shall have to be up early to-morrow, so I think I shall say good-night and good-bye. I have taken a room at the hotel, and as I find the first train to York leaves this—or rather the station—at half-past seven in the morning, it will be best to make my adieus to-night."

"How soon shall we hear from you?" said Adèle, her lip trembling.

"As soon as ever I can send a letter. I mean to travel night and day, therefore you must not be surprised if some days pass."

Arthur was himself again; the thoughts of action had been invigorating. He shook hands with Margaret, kissed his cousin and then took his departure. *They* stood together under the moonbeams silent, for their hearts were full. *He*, with never a backward look, walked steadily away along the sounding sea.

PART IV.

AT WORK WITH A WILL.

CHAPTER I.

LAURA'S TASK.

O source of the holiest joys we inherit!
O Sorrow, thou solemn, invisible spirit!
Ill fares it with man when through life's desert sand,
Grown impatient too soon for the long-promised land,
He turns from the worship of thee.

It will long ago have been suspected that Margaret was wrong in her suspicion about her husband. Maurice Grey was not the person who had taken forcible possession of her child. Jane, in her new capacity of friend and protector (for the landlady had never done anything by halves; hers was one of the world's strong natures—great in good as in evil), had opened out, with much shame and contrition, everything that concerned the transactions of that fatal day.

Her story was this: In the course of the afternoon a gentleman had come up the garden-path, and proceeding to the back instead of to the front door, had requested to have a few words with her. He had begun by asking some trivial questions about her mistress, and Jane said that as he asked them he looked at her in a searching kind of way. Apparently it did not take him many minutes to discover a certain amount of animus in her state of mind, and with the more readiness he revealed to her the object of his visit, persuading her that the service she was desired to render was very small. He was careful enough of her conscience not to tell her in so many words what he intended to do. All he asked her was to keep the fact of his having been there at all a secret as long as possible, and if she should be questioned to give a certain description of his personal appearance.

L'Estrange's revenge was perfect in its kind. In his angry bitterness he had determined to punish, and not only to punish but to humiliate, the woman who had kept him at arm's length, who offended him by her dignity, who openly showed her contempt and loathing for his character; and he had succeeded.

It was a bold scheme. Had it been deliberately planned, it might have been said to be diabolical in its clever wickedness; but the fact, though strange, was true: it was *not* deliberately planned.

When L'Estrange found Margaret's address and followed her to Middlethorpe, he had not the vaguest idea of being in any way inimical to her. He had a passionate admiration for her beauty, and he believed her to be weak. Even the persistent way in which she had hidden herself from him had nurtured this idea in his mind. He thought she was afraid of him, and his aim was to conquer this fear, to persuade her by his specious reasoning that it was foolish and vain.

He was a man who believed he understood women perfectly, and as, unhappily for himself, his experience had been rather with the weak and erring than with the strong and pure, he had a rooted contempt for the female character. The height and purity of such a soul as Margaret's it was impossible for him to understand.

It must not be supposed that L'Estrange was any monster of wickedness—he possessed, on the contrary, many good and noble traits—but his foreign training, the wandering life he had led and the strange notions he had picked up from modern sectaries had sorely impaired his moral sense. Truth was a mere name to him. To cling to it at an inconvenient season he would have considered the supreme of folly. And yet he had a kind of honor of his own. To help the weak and defend the oppressed were articles in his strange creed. If Margaret had given herself up to him and followed him in his wanderings, he would have been faithful to her even unto death.

In fact it was only tenderness for *her*, an instinctive feeling of unfitness, that had prevented him from marrying the warm-hearted, impulsive English girl who had given him her love so unreservedly.

Fortune had come to L'Estrange late in life, and unexpectedly; with it came the desire for the renewal of old ties. He did not look upon marriage as the insuperable barrier which it is happily considered here. He believed Margaret's marriage to have been one of convenience, not inclination, and that she would be rather thankful to him than the reverse for interfering with its smooth tranquillity. Hence the scene at Ramsgate, which, in reliance on Maurice's impulsive character and his English repugnance to anything approaching a scandal, he had deliberately planned.

It had succeeded beyond his hopes. Margaret was separated from her obnoxious husband, and L'Estrange believed that all he had to do was to go in and win. But for a long time she baffled him, and, as it has been seen, he misinterpreted her motives, attributing to superstitious fear of an unknown evil what really arose from disgust and horror. The success of L'Estrange with women had been so unfailing that he could not but have unbounded confidence in his own power of fascination. That the heart which had once been unreservedly his could have been transferred—and, above all, transferred to a husband—was a thing the Frenchman failed to realize.

When he fell upon the traces he had been so long seeking, his determination was this—to enlighten the fair Englishwoman, to lead her out into what he looked upon as the true land of freedom, to destroy her foolish prejudices, and then when the education was fairly begun—what? The usual fools' paradise.

It was in his surprise and indignation at finding himself utterly baffled, in the light, hateful to him, of her last strong words of contempt and loathing, that he hastily formed the scheme of cruel revenge which he carried out so cleverly. The idea was flashed in upon his brain by the very inspiration of madness.

It will be well, perhaps, to return to that afternoon when, penetrating into Margaret's sanctuary, he carried away her treasure.

The little Laura was unsuspecting. When L'Estrange en tered the parlor he found her curled up, with her favorite story-book in her hand, in a corner of the sofa. She recognized him instantly as the stranger whose kindness to her on the sands had made her think he might be her lost father. His appearance confirmed her in the idea. Throwing down her book she ran to him and took his hand with confiding frankness. "Then you *are* my papa after all?" she said.

"Who told you I was your papa, Laura?" he asked gravely.

"I told myself," replied the little one; "but come, poor mamma will be *so* pleased. I left her sitting on the sands, for she wanted to find you too, and now you've come here instead. Shall we go out and tell her?"

She did not wait for denial or assent, but dashed out of the room for her hat, while L'Estrange, rather astonished at his reception, sat and pondered for a few moments.

"She has taught her child to love him, the man who wronged and doubted her," he thought with a growing wonder. "I must have been mistaken. Does she care for him, after all?"

But the bare idea made him clench his teeth and knit his brows, till the reappearance of the child forced him to dissimulate. L'Estrange was a consummate actor. He could be all things to all men, but I think that never in his life had he set himself a harder task than this. The child was so confiding, so simple in her trust. Not much dissimulation was necessary, however. The strong emotion he felt as he took up the little one and felt her small arms round his neck was very real of its kind. For, she was Margaret's; here lay the spell.

"Laura, my child!" he murmured, and his heart turned with sudden loathing from the deed he was doing. He felt inclined to put her down and to run from the house and from the place.

But as he spoke she smiled. It was her mother's beautiful smile, such as had lit up her face in those bygone days when Margaret and he had been one in heart and mind. He hesitated no longer. "Laura," he said, putting her down and looking at her with a tenderness that was certainly not altogether put on, "I know where your mother is. She is not on the sands; she has walked so far that it would tire her to walk back. We shall have to take a carriage to find her. You are not frightened, little one? See, she has sent her scarf, that you may know I have come from her."

"Is mamma ill?" said Laura with a quivering lip.

"No, only a little tired."

"Well, then, let's go at once! But how funny of mamma to walk so far! I suppose she was talking and forgot."

A carriage which L'Estrange had already hired was waiting for them at some little distance from the house. They got into it and drove away.

For the first half hour Laura was very happy. She did not speak much, for she was a little shy of this new relation of whom she had heard so often, and for whose return she was accustomed to pray at her mother's knees.

She sat by his side, his arm round her, looking up into his face now and then to point out something they were passing or to make a simple remark, mostly about "mamma." *He* was very silent. But still they went on, up hills and down them, through villages, past trees and fields, till at last all the well-known landmarks had disappeared and Laura grew uneasy.

"Where *is* mamma?" she asked with a half inclination to tears; "she *can't* have walked so far."

He drew her on to his knees, so tenderly that she smiled again, and resting her head on his shoulder repeated the question in a quieter tone. Still no answer, and still they drove on, till not even the shelter of those loving arms could do away with the child's uneasiness; she lifted up her dark eyes pleadingly: "*Please* tell me, shall we soon get to mamma?"

Then he took both her small hands and looked at her for a moment. "My poor Laura!" he said, "what will you say to me when I tell you that you are going away from mamma?"

"Away from mamma!" replied the child, and there came a sudden terror into her eyes. But Laura was a peculiar child. The life she had lived with those much older than herself, the shadow of her mother's sorrow and the influence of her mother's life and character, had made her unlike others of her own age.

L'Estrange had been prepared for a passion of tears and cries. It did not come. Only the child drew herself out of his arms, and crouching down in a corner of the carriage looked round as though searching for a means of escape. Her case seemed hopeless, so she clasped her small hands together. "Take me back," she said, earnestly; "oh what will mamma say?—poor mamma!"

And then she cried, but it was like a woman's weeping—a still noiseless grief.

L'Estrange was a disciple of Rousseau's. He could understand the beautiful pathos of a situation, and the child's quiet tears affected him so painfully that he could scarcely refrain from giving vent to his own sentiments in some such way, but they did not persuade him to alter his purpose. He let the child weep for some time, then stooping down he drew the cold little hands from her face, and holding them in his, looked at her earnestly for a few moments.

"Come to me, Laura," he said. She half rose, but, as if bethinking herself, drew back: "It's wrong to take me away from mamma. And *why, why* did you say we were going to her?"

Yes, there lay the sting. He had deceived her, and the child distrusted him. He drew her to him. "This is a strange child," he thought, "and must be strangely treated."

"Listen to me, Laura," he said gently, "and try to trust me. I know it was wrong, very wrong, but I had a reason. I want to do good to your mamma and to you. Your mother is unhappy."

"Yes," sobbed the child; "but it's only because papa is away; if you—" She looked at him suddenly, then turned away, literally trembling with a new fear. "Are you *really* my own papa that mamma tells me stories about?" she asked with unchildlike earnestness, fixing her dark, mournful eyes on his face.

There followed a few moments of silence. L'Estrange was thinking. For the first time in all his life he was staggered. Falsehood had hitherto always befriended him, but he had never before been in such a situation as this. Mentally he cursed his own folly, and cast about in his usually ready mind for something to say, for in this pure child's presence he felt as if he dared not lie. An inspiration came. "Laura," he said earnestly, "you are much better and wiser than other children of your age or I should not say this to you. I am not your father. Remember, I never told you I was, but I love you as much as if I were, and I love your mother. I want to make her happy, and you, her little daughter, must help me."

L'Estrange did not mean precisely what he said, but for the moment he persuaded himself that he did. The child held her breath and listened.

"Laura," he continued after a pause, "what would make your mother happy?"

"For papa to come back," she said with a sigh, which he echoed. Only a few hours before he had thought to make her happiness in a very different way. But this should not interfere with his scheme.

"What if *you* found your father, Laura, and told him this—that your mother was unhappy, I mean, and wanted him back? Do you think he would come?"

The child looked up eagerly: "Oh, I'm certain he would."

"Well, petite, if you consent to come away with me, I will try and take you to your father. Do you understand me?"

Laura understood, certainly. She clasped her hands, but suddenly her face fell. "You said you would take me to mamma, and you didn't," she said; "perhaps this is just the same."

L'Estrange was right. She was a strange child and not easy to manage. As he hesitated for an answer she spoke again: "Take me back to mamma, and we can ask her about it."

"No, Laura," he said as firmly as he could, for he was easily moved and the child had touched him to the heart. And then he took her in his arms again, and smoothing back her hair kissed the tears from her eyes. For the first time he was really in earnest. Instinctively the child felt it and was soothed.

"Trust me, petite, and try to be calm. I do not mean you anything but good, my fair child, for you are dear to me as my own soul."

There was a wonderful power of fascination about this man which had seldom failed him. It had its effects on this girl-child. She looked up into his strong face convulsed with emotion, and she was comforted. Her tears ceased. She lay back silently, and he rocked her to and fro in his arms while they drove on through the gathering darkness. Was the child wrong? Had her heaven-sent gift of instinct failed her in her hour of need? I think not. Rather, in that moment this strange, complex-natured man was what he appeared—good and true. The pure child-presence, the simple words, the dark, searching eyes seemed to have drawn away his evil for the time. It was as though an angel had looked into his soul's darkness and with a ray of living light dispelled it utterly.

It must be remembered that L'Estrange was not an Englishman. There is, I think, a certain oneness of nature about the Anglo-Saxon race that renders it very difficult for its members to understand the emotional, impulsive, two-sided character of the Celt, the Latin or the Greek. An Englishman is eminently straightforward. He does not stop to analyze. Be his object good or bad, he is given to carrying it out perseveringly, leaving to the future thoughts of compunction or self-gratulation. This is doubtless sweeping, as indeed all generalities must be, but possibly a truth underlies it—a truth which may explain the extreme lack of sympathy between ourselves and our southern neighbors. With Englishwomen the case is different. There is always something in the female character that answers to this two-sidedness. Its very weakness challenges a woman's sympathy. Muscular Christianity, strong, manly straightforwardness, is very attractive in its way, but not so dangerous, I am inclined to imagine, to the female heart as this emotional impulsiveness, ready at one moment with tears of sentiment and tender analysis of feeling, and at the next with passionate indignation and deep-breathed curses.

L'Estrange was a son of the South, a pupil of the great philosopher of Nature. From his childhood upward he had indulged in every emotion that ruffled the calm of his strong spirit. From Jean Jacques he had learnt to invert the eternal unity of beauty and goodness, calling that fair which is wanting in truth. Therefore, when involuntarily, as he gazed on the child, who had sobbed herself to sleep on his shoulder, the moisture dimmed his eyes and his heart softened before her fair innocence, he felt a certain glow of self-approbation.

"I am certainly becoming a better man," he thought, but he did not make up his mind to restore the child to her mother—the woman he had once loved, the woman he had robbed of every joy.

His heart ached for her sadness as in the soft emotion of that evening her pale face came before his mind; but if he would do her good at all, it should be in his own way.

And so they drove on—Laura, wearied out with her tears and the excitement, fast asleep in the arms of the man who had taken her from her mother; L'Estrange scarcely daring to stir. In his strange way he thanked God for this sleep.

The stopping of the carriage aroused the child. They were at a station some miles distant from the one by which they usually went from Middlethorpe to York.

The night was dark; only a few stars shone through the cloud-rents. Laura started up. "Mamma!" she cried; then looking round her, she remembered and said no more. L'Estrange was watching her narrowly. He had dreaded this awakening, for he feared a passionate outburst of grief, but it did not come.

The child looked out and around her with that far-seeing look that some children have, as if they can see into the invisible, and then, as they entered the dimly-lighted station—for the little lady had insisted upon being put down to the ground—she looked up again into his face. It was the same mournful, searching gaze that had already touched him so deeply.

Apparently the scrutiny satisfied her, or it may be her woman's instinct showed her the uselessness of resistance, for she gazed away again into the night and said no more till she found herself wrapped up tenderly and laid amongst the cushions of a first-class railway carriage. L'Estrange took his seat beside her and the train began to move.

Then first the child's lip trembled, and there came a look of distress into her small face. L'Estrange stooped over her: "Are you frightened, darling?"

"Not frightened," said the little girl; "but—"

"But what? Tell me."

Then came the trouble with a burst of tears: "I want mamma to tuck me up and hear my prayers. We say them

—mamma and I—when the stars come in the sky; and the stars are up there now, and—and I want mamma."

For Laura was only a very little girl, and this want made her first realize what it was to be without her mother.

Her companion did not answer, and the child went on in her simplicity: "God is up there above the stars a very long way away, but I know He hears, for when mamma was in London and Jane was cross, I told Him and He brought her back after a long time. Oh, please, will it be a *great* many nights before we go back to mamma?"

As she spoke those silent tears so pitiful from a little child began to flow, and her companion once more felt inclined to curse himself for his short-sighted folly. He knelt down beside her in the carriage, and she saw that his face was very pale and that real tears were in his eyes.

"Ma fillette, ma chèrie," he whispered, for in his emotion the English endearments sounded hard and cold, "be patient—trust me."

For a few moments Laura was soothed, but still, as there came the gleam of the stars through the darkness, the childish wail was repeated: "I want mamma! I want mamma!"

L'Estrange was perplexed. Passionate sorrow he had expected, and he had not despaired of curing it by distractions, but this quiet pathos of grief cut him to the very soul. In its presence he was helpless. How could he comfort her?

He pondered, but for a long time in vain. At last his own childish days returned to his mind, and the stories he had learnt at his nurse's knee. "It was in parables," thought this master of human nature, "that the Great Teacher taught the world; and what were the myths of antiquity but parables to prepare the nations in their childhood for the reception of truth? By a parable I may perhaps make this little one believe that her present suffering is for a future good."

By which it will be seen that he still thought, in some vague way, of redressing the great wrong he had committed, and by means of the child, whom he had stolen in an access of bitter revenge, restoring Margaret to happiness by giving her back her husband.

"Laura," he said, lifting her from the cushions and holding her in his arms, "can you listen to a story?"

"Yes," said the child wearily.

"Listen, then, ma fillette, and try to understand me. It is long ago that I heard this story, when I was a little child like you, and perhaps you have heard it many times, for it comes from a book that English people read. There was a man who had a great many sons—twelve, I think—and he loved one of them more than all the others; we do not know why—perhaps he was beautiful and good. This boy was of course very happy at home, because he was always with his father, who gave him everything he wanted. But at last his brothers grew angry—jealous, I think you call it in English."

Laura drew in her breath with a sigh of contentment. "Why," she interrupted, "you are telling me about Joseph!"

"Yes," he replied gravely, "and ma fillette knows that Joseph was sent to a country a long way off, far from his father who loved him."

"Like me," said Laura sighing.

"And ma fillette knows, too, that Joseph saw his father again."

"After a long, long time," said the child.

"After a long time, it is true; but what did he do then?"

Laura looked away at the stars: "Gave his father bread and a house and sheep, and everything he wanted."

For she knew all about this, her favorite Bible story.

There was a pause then. The child and her companion were thinking.

At last L'Estrange spoke: "And was he sorry afterward, this good Joseph, that he had been taken away from his father?"

"I think he was glad," said Laura in a low tone; "only it was such a very, very long time. But if I thought what you say I wouldn't mind the long time."

"Think it, then, ma fillette," he said, stooping over her with his own peculiar smile, which seemed to shine like light on his dark face. And the child believed him.

It was a strange doctrine to take root in so young a mind, for the subtle parable wrought powerfully. The great fact of self-sacrifice, the suffering of some for the good of others, began to dawn upon the child's mind. It was real suffering to be separated from her mother, to be wandering with this stranger through the night instead of lying in her warm white bed in her mother's room; but Laura neither wept nor complained. Her tears ceased, and her dark eyes grew large with thought. For she had overcome her distrust of her companion; she believed with the simple faith of childhood that what he told her was true. Her strong imagination idealized him into a guide (like Great Heart in the bit of the *Pilgrim's Progress* she loved the best) come to put an end to her mother's troubles by bringing her father back to them; and for her part in the great work the child, with unchildlike calm and thoughtfulness, was ready.

It was late before they reached York, but rooms were ready at an hotel to which L'Estrange had telegraphed, and the good-natured chambermaid took every care of the little lady. Going to bed so far from mamma was hard work for the poor child, and her sobs and tears and sudden startings from sleep were subject of much speculation to the attendant; but at this time she said nothing, as her services were very liberally remunerated.

L'Estrange passed a very different night. He had been longing for its deep solitude, that he might think out undisturbed the unwonted thoughts to which the experiences of that day had given rise. And the night came—heavy, dark, brooding, suitable to his spirit's mood.

He went to his room, but there he could not rest; under its narrow roof even thought would not come to him; he rose and went out. The town was silent in the darkness, and utterly undisturbed he walked through the quaint, narrow streets, under low-browed gates and arches, till in a few minutes he gained the open country. A wide, grassy expanse it seemed to be, as far as he could see by the faint light that struggled now and then through the clouds—undulating here and there, and bordered in the distance by a fringe of wood, behind which a line of light that told of either twilight or dawn was lying low down on the horizon.

A gate opened on to the smooth turf. He unlatched it, and, after a few more rapid steps, threw himself down on the grass with his face to heaven. A sudden craving for rest of some kind—rest of conscience, rest of heart, rest of soul—

had come to him, and in the night's stillness he had set himself the task of thinking out the problem.

In the morning of the long day he had thought to rest in love. That hope had gone by. It did not require so consummate a master of human nature as himself to recognize clearly that this was vain; and strive as he would he could not forget Margaret; her beauty haunted him as the vision of impossible good must follow the lost—a torment, because unattainable for ever. Later, he had imagined that revenge in its bitter satisfaction might rest his spirit. His scheme had succeeded, but this too was vanity, or worse, for the child whom he had looked upon merely as the instrument of his vengeance had opened his eyes, and instead of rest came the stinging pang of remorse to harass his tormented soul.

And thus it had ever been with him. The beautiful "spirit of delight" he had been seeking from his youth up; always with the same result—to find under the beauty, ashes; under the glory, dull despair.

At first, as he lay there under the canopy of cloud, the thoughts of this strange man were nothing higher than self-pity and bitter complaining of wayward fate. His being seemed for the moment a thing apart from himself. He took it in his hand and reasoned on it. Why was it formed to enjoy when enjoyment was a thing unattainable? Why was it tortured with longings which for ever were destined to remain unsatisfied? Why was beauty so fair and good so lovely when always they looked on it from afar? What was this superior fate that fed its slave with mocking visions—removing evermore and ever farther the cup of bliss for which his thirsty soul was panting?

The soft sensualist felt the tears brimming to his eyes as he pondered on his calamities. It was the remembrance of his own parable that first aroused him, for the man was not naturally weak. Brought up in a different school, he might have been different. Education had made him a formalist and from forms he had turned away in his manhood, thinking in the direct opposite to find freedom and truth.

The formalist had cast off every tie of faith, only to fall into the closer bondage of fatalism. And the worst of it al. was that there seemed no opening for him into the light.

But, though he little suspected it, he had found a teacher, and in the stillness of that night the lessons fallen from the lips of one of God's little ones began to take effect upon his mind.

It was not so much his own parable as its effect upon Laura that struck suddenly to the root of his selfish murmuring. His sensuous soul had been hitherto seeking with all its power for beauty as a resting-place. He had thought to find it in the gratification of his senses, but it had always eluded him. The child's earnest look that night as she took up at his command the burden of suffering for the good that was to come—not so much to herself as to another—made a new idea dawn upon his mind. Was there, then, an unsuspected beauty even in suffering when sanctified by high ends? If so, he had been all his life seeking in vain.

Suddenly as the idea flashed in upon his brain—with the vision of that patient little face, from which something more than a child's spirit seemed to look—he sprang to his feet and walked rapidly forward into the night. Like a dream his former life seemed to map itself out before him in those few moments of intense feeling. The days, the years that had, in spite of his efforts, furrowed his face and sprinkled their gray ashes on his head, how had he spent them? In seeking the good which ever eluded him, in fleeing from the shadow that ever pursued him. The good had been happiness, beauty—the evil had been pain, suffering. Physical suffering, mental suffering, sympathetic suffering, vicarious suffering,—this he had striven to blot out from the story of his life; he would believe that it did not exist, and when in unmistakable evidence it had presented itself to his senses, he would forget its presence or drown its influence in distractions.

And now came this child-messenger to tell him that all this time he had been banishing a holy thing, a soul-purifier. It had ennobled the young face that night till an angel's pure beauty seemed to rest upon it. Even his peerless Margaret had gained in calmness and strength by those years of desolation; and he who had cast it aside as abhorrent, what was he becoming?

He asked himself this with an involuntary shudder. He had always rejoiced in the tenderness of his heart. His very objection to the sight of suffering had been laid to this account in the self-analyses which with him had been so frequent; and now what did he find himself doing? Coolly inflicting torture on a woman and child—two of the weakest of God's creatures—and all for the gratification, not of the best but of the worst feelings of his nature. Once more L'Estrange threw himself to the ground, but this time his face was turned earthward and buried in his hands, while wave after wave of bitterness passed over his troubled soul.

When he looked up the white dawn was beginning to struggle with the darkness. Gray clouds and intermediate patches of pale blue had become visible, and heavy, bead-like drops of dew stood on the blades of grass. His face was wan, like that of one who had passed through a death-agony, but it looked better. He rose to his feet and paced slowly back to the town. At the railway-station he stopped, knocked up a telegraph-clerk, and sent a message apparently to London, then returned to his room at the hotel, arousing the astonishment of two or three sleepy waiters who were up in expectation of an early train.

There he sat down before the table, opened his desk and taking from it a sheet of paper began a letter. It seemed a difficult one to write, for sheet after sheet was destroyed before he could satisfy himself. It was accomplished at last, however, and the words written seemed to be very few, but a smile flitted over his face as he read them. Then he pressed the paper to his lips, enclosed it in an envelope, and wrote the address with a trembling hand.

L'Estrange's method of spelling English words was very eccentric. He could speak the language well enough, as he had lived long in England, but he could never bring himself to write it. Why words should be spelt in such an arbitrary way he could not or would not understand. All he could suppose was that the English would keep in this, as in everything else, to their national characteristic of eccentricity.

English eccentricity had always been a fruitful theme with L'Estrange. On the point of spelling he was obstinate. He persisted in spelling phonetically, and as a natural consequence his letters very often went astray.

It will be as well to say at once that this was the unhappy fate of the letter in which his mental struggles culminated. It was written in French and addressed to Margaret. She never got it. Three weeks later, after vain endeavors had been made to procure it some destination, it was returned to the hotel from which it had been written. There it awaited the return of its writer.

CHAPTER II.

A WASTED LIFE.

A glorious Devil, large in heart and brain,
That did love Beauty only (Beauty seen
In all varieties of mould and mind),
And Knowledge for its beauty; or if Good,
Good only for its beauty, seeing not
That Beauty, Good and Knowledge are three sisters
That doat upon each other—friends to man,
Living together under the same roof,
And never can be sundered without tears.

The heavy rings round Laura's eyes and her general languor when she appeared in the private sitting-room her protector had taken deeply grieved him.

For a few moments he felt inclined to act upon his natural impulse of kindliness—to take the child back to her mother, and pursue his strange scheme of setting Margaret right with her husband by himself. But a remnant of selfishness withheld him. Laura, in her sweet, childish innocence and in the unchildlike development of her inner life, was a beautiful problem, the like of which had never before, in all his wanderings through the fields of humanity, been presented to him. He longed to study her more closely, and this could only be done by following out his original scheme. He determined, therefore, to leave the decision to her.

He said very little during breakfast-time, only watched her with a certain curiosity. He was grateful to this child who had opened a door of light in his soul, though he was not near enough to her in purity and beauty to know how great was the service she had rendered him.

Breakfast was something of a pretence to both of them. The longing for her mother, and the brave determination to choke it down in her heart till she had done what was required of her—found this unknown father and brought him back—made the child too excited for eating to be any pleasure to her; and L'Estrange at the best of times could not eat so early.

When it was over the child got up. "Please," she said hesitatingly. She was in a great perplexity about what she should call her new protector.

He read her thought: "Come here, Laura."

She went quietly to his side, and he drew her on to his knees. "I knew another Laura once," he said quietly, stroking back her hair; "she was the sister of your mother; but she is dead now, pauvre enfant!" And then he continued, as if talking to himself: "Comme elle était gentille, la chère petite!"

"That must be my aunt Laura," said the child; "mamma has a picture of her, and I kiss it sometimes."

"Yes, she would be your aunt, ma fillette; you are like her. Ah! I remember now—it is of her that your eyes make me think. Turn round to the light."

"But why do you talk about Aunt Laura?" said the child impatiently. "Please, I want a sheet of paper. I can only write big letters, but I think mamma would understand."

"Patience, ma mie. *I* have written a letter to your mother. See, it is here, all ready to be sent, and if you like some of your big letters can go inside. You shall put it in the post-box yourself, that you may trust your old friend as the other Laura did. I told you about her because of what she used to call me. I should like you to do the same. It was *mon père.* Can you say that?"

"Mon père," said Laura, in her small childish voice. Then she thought a few moments: "That means my father, doesn't it? But you are not my papa."

"I must be your father till you find your own, Laura," he said gravely. "Shall it be so?"

"Yes, mon père," said the child, smiling up into his face.

And from that moment she never doubted her protector. He on his part became more determined than ever in the pursuit of his new object. Little by little the child was doing childhood's Heaven-given work, drawing away selfishness and bringing pure love in its place. It was this that brought him to try his experiment. He watched the child as she sat down before a large sheet of paper with a pencil, writing painfully her letter to her mother. L'Estrange had all the innate delicacy of a refined mind; he would not attempt to see what the words were that the child was tracing.

She brought the paper to him when the letter was done, and stood beside him as he folded it up; but before it was finally put away he hesitated: "Which would you rather, Laura—for this letter to go to your mother, or to go back yourself?"

For a moment the child's face looked bright and joyous, but only for a moment. The flush faded, she clasped her small hands together: "We must find papa first; but, oh, I hope it will be soon!"

The strong man turned away; he had difficulty in keeping himself from weeping like a child. When he spoke again his voice was calm: "We must lose no time then, Laura." He rang the bell, and the waiter appeared. "Send the chambermaid here."

When after a few moments the soft-hearted Jane came in, he gave her money, ordering, in those imperative tones which always gained a hearing with his inferiors, that the little lady should be supplied without delay with every necessary for a long journey. He did not deign to explain, nor did Jane venture to remonstrate. She went to an outfitter's, procured all that was necessary, and in half an hour from that time they were ready for another start.

There followed a long and wearisome day, for the heat and dust were excessive, and before it was over, L'Estrange for the hundredth time repented as he looked on the patient little flushed face that would yet show no sign of weariness.

Arthur had been right in his conjecture. They were remarkable travellers, and many were the comments of those who journeyed with them—the man, with his dark face and foreign appearance and imperious conduct, and the fair English child, at the very sight of whom his face seemed to melt into tenderness and his manners to take the softness of those of a woman. And no woman could have watched over her child more lovingly or tended it with greater care than he watched over and tended his little charge. Food and drink he brought her with his own hands when it was possible to obtain them; whenever her position grew wearisome she rested in his arms, the imperious voice sinking to lulling murmurs as he told her long nursery-tales which he made out of everything they passed. A house, a stream, the cows in a meadow would be sufficient material for his fertile brain. Once even, when the black grimy dust had literally overpowered the fastidious little lady, and her timidity prevented her from appealing to the attendant in a waiting-room, he took her himself to a kind of pump, and dipping his cambric handkerchief into the cool water washed her hands and face so effectually that she laughed for pleasure. It was her first laugh since the moment when she had discovered that she was going away from her mother, and it caused L'Estrange as sincere a throb of gladness as he had ever known in all his life, for this child was gradually becoming to him something more than a child—something more even than the offspring of the woman who through all his lovings and longings had most entirely held his heart. He began to look upon her, in his strange fatalistic way, as a mysterious thing, sent to him at the very darkest hour of all his dark career to touch his blackness with fingers of light and bring good near to his soul.

And perhaps it was partly the truth. There is, for those who can understand the mystery, something divine in childhood; certainly, if not nearer to God than we, children have the power of drawing out the divine that is in us. L'Estrange felt this in a very peculiar way; he treated the child with a loving reverence, watching jealously her every word and movement as one who looks for an inspiration.

And so the long hours of the day wore away. When they reached London it was already late in the afternoon. Laura was tired, but she would not hear of remaining there for the night, she was too anxious to press on.

They were met at the Great Northern Station by a gentleman who appeared to have been expecting them. This man gave them a boisterous welcome, shook hands warmly with

L'Estrange, who did not seem to reciprocate his cordiality, and, chucking Laura under the chin in a familiar way, asked her where she was going. The child's lady-like instincts were offended. She answered quietly that she did not know, and clung to her protector's hand.

The stranger laughed in a peculiar way, and turned to L'Estrange: "I didn't know you had a daughter, mossou."

"*Monsieur*," replied he, emphasizing the French word, "was mistaken, as he very often is."

"Well! well!" answered the other rapidly—he was our friend Mr. Robinson—"I can't stand here wasting my time. I gather from the telegram, which duly arrived this morning, that you sent for me about a certain subject. I *may* have information for you—I *may* not."

"It shall be worth Monsieur Rob*ee*nson's while to give me his information," replied L'Estrange quietly, but with a kind of sarcastic courtesy.

The courtesy struck Mr. Robinson's mind, the sarcasm glanced over him harmlessly. "Of course, of course!" he protested volubly. "You foreigners put things strangely, mossou; ignorance of English ways, no doubt. Allow me to explain myself. In expectation of this (you gave me reason a little while ago to believe it might possibly be wanted) I have kept myself acquainted with the movements of the party discussed between us. You will doubtless remember the occasion. Naturally the firm is slightly out of pocket. These investigations, you must understand, are costly, but everything shall be done in due form between us. In the mean time, if I can be of any service—"

"Oblige me," said L'Estrange with the same manner, that might be either courtesy or its semblance, "by taking this as an instalment." He handed him a paper packet. "The firm I can settle with when your lawyer's bill comes in. *Your* services, monsieur, are for the moment personal."

Mr. Robinson bowed. His fingers itched to get to the inside of the packet, but it would have been unprofessional to show anxiety, so it rested quietly in his palm. L'Estrange looked at Laura to see how much of all this she had understood. The little girl was still holding his hand, but her thoughts seemed to be elsewhere, and he addressed himself again to the lawyer: "Tell me, in as few words as can be, where was he heard of last?"

"The last remittances were sent to Moscow. A few weeks ago he was certainly there—probably is so still."

"Moscow!" L'Estrange repeated the word in a dismayed tone, looking down as he did so at the child whose hand he held.

Mr. Robinson guessed his thought, and broke in volubly: "You surely don't think of going there yourself, and with that child too! Why, it would be preposterous, and not the smallest necessity. Give us time and we can gain further information. If necessary, I could go there myself, though of course it would be an expensive business. In any case, leave your little girl. My wife would be delighted to look for a nice school—conducted, you know, on Christian principles—where every care would be taken, both in the way of physical and mental training."

Mr. Robinson would have his say out. He affected to consider that duty required him to give salutary advice in season and out of season; and as duty, in his sense of the term, was always closely connected with business, he had already in his own mind fixed upon a temporary residence for the child. A lady who owed him a long outstanding bill was anxious to take in pupils. This new client was evidently a liberal payer: through the profits made out of the child a part, at least, of that just debt might be paid off.

But his client did not look at matters in the same light. He tried to stop his voluble utterances, for the little hand he held was trembling. Laura, hearing herself discussed, had taken a sudden interest in the proceedings. She looked up at her protector and saw that his brows were knit angrily. This alarmed her. She burst into tears. "Oh! please don't leave me with him," she sobbed; "take me with you or let me go back to mamma."

How his face changed as he heard the child's cry! It became suddenly soft as that of a woman. He stooped down to her and wiped away her tears, whispering all kinds of gentle assurances. Then he turned again to the lawyer with that ominous frown: "You see what you have done. Be so good, monsieur, as in the future to preserve business relations in our necessary intercourse, nor presume to advise me at all on matters that do not concern you."

Another man would have been struck dumb or else have retired offended, but the lawyer was of the tough sort. This was too valuable a client to be sacrificed to feelings. "No offence meant, I assure you, sir," he hastened to say—"only interest; but" (seeing the frown gather) "to return to business. I have a few more details that may be useful—the address of an agent in Moscow, the—"

"Write them out for me, and send them to the usual address in Paris by to-morrow morning's mail. At the present, monsieur, we have no more time for delay. It is necessary to dine before taking the train again to Southampton."

"You leave, then, this evening? Can I be of any further—"

"No, thank you, Mr. Robeenson." He bowed in his stately manner and turned away to the refreshment-rooms with Laura, leaving the lawyer on the platform, still grinning his contentment.

As they distanced him the child gave a sigh: "I'm so glad he's gone!"

"Why, then, did you not like him, ma mie?"

"No, mon père, not at all; he doesn't look good."

"I think the bébé is right," he said in a low tone; "mais que faut il faire?—Little wise one," he continued aloud, "we must take the people as we find them, some good and some bad, making our own use of them all. Is that too hard a philosophy for the little brain?"

Apparently it was, for the child made no answer.

In the mean time L'Estrange had seated her at one of the marble-topped tables, and before thinking about his own dinner was trying to find out what would best suit her appetite. The well-feed waiter was flying about to supply all her wants; dainty after dainty, which she scarcely touched, was put upon her plate. It was such a new scene to Laura that her appetite fled with the excitement.

Many looked at her curiously in the crowded room, for Laura was a peculiarly beautiful child. Her golden curls and her dark, lustrous eyes, with the transparent delicacy of complexion she had inherited from her mother, and the childish grace which is the gift of God to her age of helplessness, made her very attractive. She was rather embarrassed at the attention she excited, noticing which her protector stood up and folding his arms looked right and left so haughtily that the most compassionate and least curious of the many beholders felt as if their admiration of the fair child had been an indiscretion.

After dinner the wearied little one fell asleep in his arms, and only awoke to find herself in the train, which was far on its way to Southampton. She was getting accustomed to her new friend and to these sudden wakings; so this time, to his great relief, she did not cry out for her mamma, but clung to him still more closely. They stopped at Southampton. It was a lovely night, the sea still as glass and the dark blue sky alight with moonshine and studded with stars.

Laura and her protector stood together on the steamer's deck. "Will ma fillette go to bed?" he asked.

The child shook her head. "Oh! *please* let me stay out here," she pleaded. "I promise not to be a trouble, and the stars are so nice."

Without another word he wrapped her up in his own fur-lined overcoat and made a bed for her on one of the seats, himself watching beside her.

But this time Laura could not sleep, the position was too strange. "What is that noise?" she asked nervously as the plash of the water against the great paddle-wheels came to her ears.

"The water and the wheels," he answered. "The wheels are rolling along through the waves, taking us over the sea."

The child raised herself on her elbow and looked round: "Where are we going? There's only sky and clouds out there. But, oh!" clasping her hands in delight, "look at the moon on the water. I see it like that at home sometimes. Once, when I could not go to sleep, mamma took me to the window, and a little bit of the sea was all white as it is tonight. She said it was the moon, and now we're going to catch the moon in the water. Oh! *why* didn't mamma come?"

For this was the ever-recurring trouble of the child. Her love for her mother was stronger and more enduring than it generally is among those of her age. A mother gives; but very often years pass before she receives any return to her devotion. Laura's love was strong, because, in the first place, there was nothing to divide it: her young life had never held another affection. Then her love and childish sympathy had for some time been partially checked, and, it may be, had therefore grown stronger in their secret place. Only during the last weeks had her young affection had its free course in the light of her mother's comprehending love.

Her plaint made her companion wince, but he would not answer it. After a few moments he looked at her again and saw that tears were in her eyes. They were reflecting, in their moistness, the white shimmering moonlight; in its pure unearthly shining the little face seemed almost transfigured.

L'Estrange had been superstitious from his youth up. He was the very creature of those dreams and inspirations to which the glowing South gives birth. Perhaps they had weakened his strong intellect. At any rate they had kept it in the shadowy twilight, giving little chance for living truth to make its entrance into his soul.

The look on the child's face startled him. "*Does* she belong to this earth?" he asked himself.

"Laura," he whispered, "look away from the stars. Doubtless they are thy sisters and brothers, little one, but look for one moment from them to me, and say what thoughts are in the busy little brain at this moment?"

The child smiled: "I was thinking about the moon and about mamma, mon père. I was wondering if she is looking at the moon now, and if she got my letter, and if she misses me very much."

Her simple reflections did not satisfy her friend. I think at the moment he would scarcely have been surprised if the child had developed budding wings and floated away into the sympathetic moonshine; his superstition, it may be, specially as displayed by one whose sex might have been supposed to lift him above such weakness, will seem strange and improbable to the majority of readers. A *man allow* himself to think seriously of such follies? Yes—a *man*, and not the first nor the last, by a great many. The inhabitants of our island are not alone on the face of the earth. In the glow of the sunny South, where generations have lapped their souls in sunshine and indolently lived on the abundant gifts of lavish Nature, where life can be sustained by a little, and the struggle for existence is less painful and bitter, there has been time for dreaming; and perhaps this has enervated the moral sense and loosened the sinews of mind, till pleasure has become a god and the mind receptive of strange things.

In the early days of civilization, before these things had wrought fully on the character, pure reason, law and its cold abstractions, divine art and severe philosophy made the South their centre, for when we think of these first Athens and then Rome come before the mind. And at that age in the gray formless North the legend flourished, with many a wild superstition. But all that has changed. A light dawned upon the mighty tribes; their superstitions fell, and they girded themselves with strength, while evermore in the sunny lands dreams gained ground, and weakness followed in their train, till at last what is it that we see? In the city where Pericles ruled, where Socrates taught, where Plato reasoned, they dream and do not; in imperial Rome a shadow, an old mediæval fiction, has kept the people from freedom as they gloried in the past and dreamed about the future, and in the mean time we of the gray North are rapidly casting from us almost everything but what we can see, taste, hold and understand.

Be practical! is the watchword of the age, and sentiment is repudiated, and imagination cried down or relegated to extreme youth and the weakest of weak womanhood. Are there many, I wonder, who find the medium—whose strong souls are strong enough to allow that there is something which passes their ken—who think it no shame to be at certain moments swayed by sentiment, governed by a dream of ideal loveliness, and yet who work on in their daily calling unsickened and undismayed?

There are some such souls, and to no climate are they peculiar. L'Estrange might have been one of them. There was in his imaginative faculty, in his receptivity to beauty and sentiment, in his sympathetic tenderness, a something that marked him out as one born to a higher life than that of self-gratification. His success among women was chiefly owing to this. For it is the good, not the bad in a character, that draws and enchains the loving worship of womanhood.

Where a man reads weakness a woman's keen eye beholds what underlies that weakness, and if *it* be lovable she is ready to adore.

What L'Estrange wanted was this: A soul to understand the beauty and glory of truth—truth on the lips and truth in the life. To indulge his love of beauty he had wrapped himself in the rose-colored mists of dreams; to preserve himself and others from pain he had never hesitated to resort to falsehood. He might have been very different. Some of the misery of that "might have been" was in his soul that evening as he turned from the child and paced up and down the steamer's deck, for a dark hour had come and he could not bear to face his good genius. With arms folded and brows knit, his dark face looking forward into the moonlight, he thought until thinking was pain. But the influence of the child had begun to work. He would not, as he usually did, cast aside the painful thinking because of the pain that was in it; rather he looked it in the face, trying to touch its centre, and so, it might be, find a cure.

Oh, it was a hard task! For his was the misery of a wasted life, and a life that had brought desolation. True his innate refinement, the self-respect of a high intellect, had kept him tolerably free from what is gross and degrading, but that midnight retrospect was bitter notwithstanding. Pleasure sought and taken at the expense of truth; blighted lives, to which he had brought the warm beauty of love, leaving them when the mood had changed to find it where they could; good that he might have done and did not; wasted talents, used-up powers,—these came before his conscience in an accusing throng. And there was no help for it. He had one life only, and the best of that life had gone. L'Estrange, though he professed to believe in a futurity to the soul, was that saddest of all beings, a practical infidel. In the misery of self-communion his thoughts turned suddenly to the memory of his boyhood's faith, to the days when heaven had been a reality and the saints robed in white, the pure queen of the skies, the fair infant in her breast, had formed part of his hopes and dreams for the future. They had vanished like myths born of the early vapor. They had been too shadowy to bear the inroad of hot, lurid noon. Tried, they had been found wanting, and what had he left in the hour when his heart and spirit craved for something unearthly as their rest? Nothing. All he found within, as he ventured shudderingly to lift the curtain that hides the unseen from the seen, was a "certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation," which no man, if ten times over an infidel, can escape when the hour comes.

His dark face darkened. If all were hopeless, then why should he pause? Why had the good that was in him made him hesitate at last? He would crush it down and gain his own ends, even through suffering itself. He stopped in his rapid walk and looked over the vessel's side. It was a real blackness, for clouds had covered the face of the moon, and had gathered here and there in heavy masses on the horizon.

A moaning wind swept across the sea, ruffling the waters till the vessel rocked to and fro. Then the dark face relaxed. The desolation of the watery waste had been responsive to his mood. "So be it, then," he muttered, looking out into the darkness. He was for the moment like the grand creation of Milton, that ideal Lucifer, when his last struggles after goodness have culminated in the fatal cry, "Evil, be thou my good!"

But L'Estrange was not yet absolutely God-forsaken. As he spoke something touched his knees. He looked down impatiently. But suddenly his impatience changed. He drew himself away with a murmured exclamation and a strange contraction of heart. Was it a miracle? For this was what he saw. The kneeling figure of a child, the hands clasped and the eyes lifted up to his. On the face was a bright shining that made the golden hair like a saint's halo, and brought out the picture in every small detail—the tremulous lips, the fair soft brow, the lustrous eyes under their silken fringe. The face was Laura's. In her companion's mood it seemed transfigured, like that of an angel lamenting over his sins and follies. Involuntarily he bowed his head. The strong man trembled like a child at the evidence of all he had imagined, and yet the phenomenon was very commonplace. This was what had caused it. The faithful child had read his trouble, and as she had already allowed him to find his way to her heart, it made that little heart sad. In her mother's sadness Laura had sometimes proved a comforter, and the thought came into her head that she might comfort her friend. So when he had stopped by the vessel's side the little child had risen noiselessly, and kneeling by his side had clasped her small hands about his knees. Then came the partial darkness, which with her friend's seeming indifference frightened her so much that she loosened her hold and looked up pleadingly. A sailor who was walking about with a lantern looking after the rigging had been watching this little episode. In his curiosity he caused its light to shine full upon the child's face, so that when L'Estrange turned round he saw it irradiated, while, as the sailor stood behind him, the source of the sudden radiance was hidden.

The illumination did not last longer than a few minutes. The man turned away to his business, his heart softer for this glimpse of innocent beauty; Laura and her protector were left in the darkness. But until the day of his death L'Estrange believed that the light which irradiated the child came down from heaven.

He was recalled to his belief in Laura's mortality by a little wailing cry. She put out her hands to feel for her friend, as the darkness and silence alarmed her. Then he stooped down reverently and lifted her up in his arms. The sorrowing angel was his own little Laura, fair and pure in her habitation of flesh and blood, for, clasping her small arms about his neck, she burst into a passion of tears. The darkness, the sense of loneliness, the over-excitement had wrought upon the child's nerves, and L'Estrange forgot all his wild thoughts in the effort to comfort her. Instead of seeking evil as a good, he became tender as the tenderest of fathers while he strove to make her forget her fears.

He succeeded at last. She lay on his knees, quiet, only for a sob or two at intervals, her golden head against his breast, one hand round his neck, the other lost in his large grasp—she was afraid of losing her friend again—and he soothed her by murmuring low, crooning melodies that he thought he had forgotten long ago. Then when the morning came and they were near their destination, he took her to the stewardess for all needful combing and dressing. But from that time L'Estrange treated the mortal child with a strange reverence.

Later in that day, when they were wandering through the quaint streets and corners of old Rouen, and the child had almost forgotten her sorrows in wonder and delight, he brought his trouble to his young oracle. "Have you ever been naughty, Laura?" he asked, looking down upon her with a smile that was almost one of incredulity.

The child smiled: "Oh yes, mon père—a number of times."

"And what did you do, ma fillette?—when you were naughty, I mean."

"I told mamma about it," said the child simply, "and she always said something to make me good again."

"But, Laura, when people are grown up and have no mamma to tell, what must they do then?"

For a moment the child looked troubled and thoughtful; then, as a light seemed to dawn upon her, she smiled. "I should think they might tell God," she said.

The wayworn man bowed his head, and that evening in the solitude he told God. For the child was making him believe in the actual goodness (for only the Good could have made anything so good and pure) and in the possibility of goodness for himself, as he was still able to love and reverence it.

Slowly the light dawned upon his benighted soul, and only after many struggles with the darkness that was in him: this telling God was the beginning.

CHAPTER III.

A TALE ABOUT THE STARS.

Could we but deem the stars had hearts, and loved,
They would seem happier, holier, to us even than now;
And ah! why not?—they are so beautiful.

THE strange travellers continued their wanderings. News reached them at Paris about the object of their journey, but news so indefinite that L'Estrange thought it well to proceed with caution. In any of the places through which they passed it was possible Maurice Grey might be found. He did not seem to be in Moscow, although for the time all communications were to be addressed to an agent there.

He told as much as was possible of his plans and ideas to the child, and her impatience was stayed while they wandered through the English quarter of Paris and appeared in the galleries and public places—her friend, who knew the city well, making every inquiry about the stranger's residence there.

And in the mean time L'Estrange enjoyed his peculiar position and the kind of mystery that the beautiful, fair-haired child excited among the few of his friends whom he could not avoid meeting. Mystery had always been one of his chief tools. He delighted in wrapping himself up in this misty obscurity. It challenged curiosity and excited interest. He was given to appearing and disappearing without rendering to any one an account of his motives, and the rumors current about him were many. Even his nationality was a matter of doubt to some of his nearest associates. The general idea was that he travelled here and there as a secret emissary from one of the societies which work under ground in Europe, or else that he was an agent from some one of its governments. L'Estrange enjoyed this curiosity. It suited his purposes, and he never, or very seldom, lifted the veil. To say the truth, the aims of his journey were as varied and complex as himself. This was not the first that had been undertaken with a good object, though never before, perhaps, had self been so entirely set aside.

Maurice Grey was his enemy. He had taken his treasure. He had possessed himself—for the fact was slowly dawning on his mind through the child's innocent prattle—not only of the person, but of the heart and affections, of the one woman in all the world for whom he had ever cherished a perfect sympathy. For although L'Estrange had felt many times a certain power in womanhood, although his senses had been enchained and his self-love flattered, yet it was true that this time only had his whole being been surrendered, this once only had love become one with his life—entered into him as a thing from which nothing but death could free him.

Sometimes, as with *his* child beside him he wandered through the gay city, it came over him like a flood what it would be to come upon this man, to look into his face, to behold in it the workings of that soul which for an apparent weakness could have cast off Margaret; and then to do what? To take his revenge by proclaiming in words that could not be denied the purity of his forsaken wife—by giving up into his keeping the child whose young love he had despised. And if, after all, he should be unworthy of this happiness? L'Estrange was walking through the Champs Elysées with Laura late in the afternoon of a sultry day when this thought dawned upon him.

He stopped, and sitting down on one of the chairs drew the child to his knees. There was a fierce determination in his face that half frightened her.

"Mon père!" she said gently.

He turned his face from her and hid it with his hand. L'Estrange was vowing a great vow with himself.

"By Heaven!" he muttered, but so low that she could not hear, "I will watch him, and if I read this weakness in his face he shall never know."

Then he looked forward down the avenue.

A tall, well-shaped and well-dressed man, English evidently, from his carriage and general appearance, was sauntering leisurely in the direction of the Place de la Concorde with a young French girl, who seemed to be chattering volubly and making good use of her eyes, hanging on his arm. There was a carelessness in his manner to her that seemed to mark her out as not precisely of his own position in the social scale, and this, as well as a certain resemblance, tempted L'Estrange to follow the pair.

"Stay where you are till I come back," he whispered to the child. In the gathering twilight he followed till he was close on the heels of the young Englishman.

His companion was at that moment looking up coaxingly into his face.

"But how close you Englishmen are!" she was saying in a wheedling tone. "I am dying of curiosity, mon ami. Tell me, then, about this immaculate, this runaway husband, this milord Anglais, who finds nothing better to do than pine away perhaps die, for the wife he has left behind. Mon dieu! what a nation! You are great, vous autres, in love as in war; but why does he hide? One might find a method of consoling him; pas vrai?"

L'Estrange, who had crept under the shadow of the trees, and was now walking parallel with the pair, could see by the light of one of the scattered lamps that the young man's brow darkened.

"He doesn't want such consolation as yours, Laurette. But why do you persist in questioning me? I have told you a dozen times that Maurice Grey will never be game for us—for *us*," he continued with a strange emphasis. "If I had taken *his* advice—"

She smiled—a smile that looked rather dangerous: "Your associates would not have been the same. Continue then, mon ami. Are we not friends?"

"Of course, of course," he said hastily. "Ma chère, what a little goose you are, taking up a fellow in this serious kind of style! You see, it's all your own fault—you put me out of temper by talking about that prig. I believe he has buried himself in the wilds. I saw him last in St. Petersburg; then he said he was going to the mountains. But, good gracious! how should this interest you? I shall be jealous presently, Laurette, and think you in love with my saintly cousin."

Laurette laughed—a clear, ringing laugh, but to the watchful listener it sounded hollow.

"There is sadness under that mirth," he said to himself; "she has tried her wiles on the Englishman, and tried them in vain; so much the better for him."

After a few more light words, Laurette and her companion turned into a brilliantly-lit and decorated *café*. L'Estrange walked slowly back to the seat where he had left Laura. His face was very pale and his fine mouth was quivering. A fear had been partially laid to rest, but it might be that even in the fear a hope, the shadow of self-love, had rested.

As he drew near to the seat where Laura had been left his steps quickened, for the murmur of her sweet voice reached his ears. Some one was speaking to her, and his unquiet conscience filled him with fear. Perhaps they were trying to steal away his treasure.

His fears were realized. A man was leaning over the child's chair and speaking to her earnestly. Laura looked troubled and irresolute, but all her hesitation fled when she saw her friend. She rose suddenly, eluding with the agility of a child the grasping hand that sought to detain her, and took refuge in his arms.

The darkness and his knowledge of Paris favored L'Estrange. He caught her up and disappeared among the shadows with the rapidity of lightning, leaving the man, who was Golding's agent and had been triumphing in his discovery, altogether baffled. He had certainly shown very little judgment, for he had not even mentioned that he had come from her mother. The first thing he had done was to bewilder the child by cross-examination, to test the truth of his discovery. Then he had told her, in the directest way possible, that the man with whom she was travelling was a bad man, and that it was her duty to leave him at once. This, Laura, who had given her faith to her companion, entirely disbelieved. She rather feared the stranger who had come in the darkness to steal her away from her friend.

But all these contradictions puzzled her brain; she felt alarmed, and in her bewilderment the sight of her friend was reassuring. It was rest for the weary child to be gathered up into his strong arms, and his sudden flight through the cool night-air was rather satisfactory than the contrary. The dry manner of this man of business was so different from the tender reverence, the deep emotion, of the man she called her father!—what wonder then that the little girl, woman-like in her instincts, trusted the one and was glad to flee from the other?

With long strides L'Estrange passed on through the darkness, for, though the child was in his arms, he did not grow weary. His love prevented him from feeling her a burden.

"I shall only give thee up to one, my treasure," he whispered; and Laura was quite content.

If she was becoming unspeakably dear to her friend, he was also becoming dear to her. In his tenderness and devotion he seemed to clasp her round like a providence. The little one began to think that he must be her father, whatever he might say to the contrary.

And while she was thinking they went on together more slowly, as the darkness deepened and the danger of pursuit became less, into the very heart of Paris, among its network of streets and lanes. L'Estrange knew every inch of the way as well by night as by day. This was not his first midnight flight.

They stopped at last before a small house in a little side street. L'Estrange rang the bell, and there came a respectable middle-aged woman to the door. She smiled her recognition, then put out her hand and drew them in.

"C'est toi, donc, mon ami? et, mon Dieu! un bébé! Comment! Mais entre toujours."

She took the candle from the concierge, and preceded them up stairs to a little room furnished partly as a bedroom and partly as a sitting-room. Then, when they had seated themselves and she had removed Laura's hat and jacket, she began bustling about, helpful as a Frenchwoman generally is, to prepare everything for their further stay. L'Estrange stopped her:

"A thousand thanks, ma bonne Marie: we go on to-night."

She shrugged her shoulders, a significant gesture. Marie was a very old friend, and L'Estrange had been her benefactor. She knew his weakness. "As you will, mon ami," she answered, "but this bébé wants rest," she continued in English, approaching the child and stroking her fair hair caressingly.

The bébé had been sitting in a large arm-chair, looking curiously about her. She was perfectly happy and comfortable, for her friend was with her, and Marie's benevolent face and pleasant cheerful voice had inspired her with confidence.

"I'm not at all tired, thank you," she said; "mon père carried me a long way."

The woman turned round abruptly: "This is not yours, Adolphe?"

"Pour le moment," he answered; and she did not dare to question him further, for this man, when he liked, could be repellant even to his friends. But the shadow passed. He chatted gayly with Marie upon a variety of subjects, sent a messenger to their hotel to settle their account and bring their portmanteau, and partook with Laura of coffee of

Marie's making, and of such few substantials as she could get together in a hurry.

The Frenchwoman was commissioned, sorely to Laura's perplexity, to take her to the station from which they were to start for Vienna according to L'Estrange's plans. But she had full confidence in her friend, and made no demur. He went in a separate conveyance, meeting them in the waiting-room. Before he joined them he looked round searchingly. The train was on the point of starting, and the first-class passengers, penned up in expectation of the signal to take their places, were not many. L'Estrange seemed to breathe more freely as at last he sat down by Laura, and there was a light of triumph and hope in his face, which the keen-eyed Frenchwoman remarked. She kept her own counsels, but her eyes were moist as she bade them heartily farewell. Laura and her companion sped onward for another weary journey. Travelling was life to him, it had become his second nature, and the child was so tenderly cared for, so constantly amused, that she scarcely knew how long the time was.

A night and a day and another night, with only a few hours' interval—for she cared no more for rest than her companion—and at last Vienna was reached. There L'Estrange determined to rest for a few days, because he feared that in spite of all his efforts the child's health might suffer from the constant movement; besides, he had given orders that letters should be addressed to a hotel in that city. Some of these might possibly contain information which would greatly affect their further movements.

L'Estrange was beginning to be cautious, for he saw he was watched—that an effort was being made to follow him. This puzzled him considerably. He could not imagine how the search had arisen. He had thought that his letter would have explained everything to Margaret, and that with the hope before her of the child being instrumental in bringing back the father she would have acquiesced in his certainly rather wild proceedings. She knew him well enough to be aware that, heavy as his sins had been, from this sin he was free. He had never hurt a weak thing. She had known and seen how in the past his tenderness had carried him even too far some times, and she could not believe him so utterly changed. He had imagined that when she knew of his sudden repentance she would have been ready even to trust her treasure in his hands, in full faith that he meant well by her and by her child. And so far L'Estrange was right. If Margaret had received that strange letter, penned, as it were, with his heart's life blood, she would have been woman enough to have read its reality—she would have waited patiently, trustfully for the issue. The misfortune was that she did *not* receive it.

He had written to her again from Paris, but this time he had been still more bewildered about the address. Laura could not assist. Like her friend, she could have found her way to her mother's cottage even in the night, but she had never thought much about the name of the place where she lived, and its spelling was quite beyond her. Fate was inexorable. His second letter went astray like the first, and Laura, who was hoping for an answer to her big letters, and L'Estrange, who was looking passionately for one line to tell him that he was forgiven and understood, were both destined to disappointment. There was a letter, however, an English letter, which partially explained the mystery of the attempt to recapture Laura on the Champs Elysées.

Mr. Robinson, that most respectable of solicitors, had been highly satisfied with the contents of the mysterious little packet which his foreign client had put into his hands at the Great Northern Station. It confirmed him in his opinion that the Frenchman was likely to be valuable. He determined at once to make himself useful. And no one understood better how to make himself useful without needlessly disturbing his conscience or compromising his character for rectitude. He had scented a mystery in the fair-haired English child, and Margaret's story, related to him on the day following his meeting with L'Estrange, made him imagine that he saw through it. Hence his lukewarmness in the pursuit entrusted to him. But the young Arthur's vigorous championship alarmed him for his client. He saw that everything would be done for the recovery of the child, whom it was his firm conviction the Frenchman had stolen, from some motive utterly unguessed at by himself.

After Arthur had left him the lawyer cogitated for a while.

it would not do for him, in his capacity of family lawyer to Mrs. Grey, and more especially still in his character for even ultra-scrupulousness, to appear to connive at such a deed as this of his client's, but he might, by warning him of the search which was being set on foot, buy his gratitude, and, what was better still, bind him to himself.

After much planning he resolved to give the little episode of Arthur's visit and the search that was being inaugurated for the lost child as a piece of gossip which might be interesting to his client on account of his supposed connection with Laura's father. The letter was a grand piece of lawyer's art, and Mr. Robinson chuckled over it with delight.

L'Estrange saw through the artifice, and as he read the letter his dark face looked grim. Opposition was like food to his determined soul. He set his teeth together, vowing inwardly that he would carry out his project in spite of them all.

They were detained at Vienna. It was as he had feared: the constant movement, the over-excitement, the strange, new life, had been too much for Laura. She had a slight feverish attack, but her friend, who knew a little of everything, had studied medicine in his early years, not with a view of entering the profession, for as a profession he despised it, but simply to increase and intensify his power over his fellows. He knew how to treat the child, and was not even alarmed at her sudden weakness. Rest and quietness were the best remedies, and these he gave her, with some simple medicine whose efficacy he had often tested. The child was inclined to be sorely fretted at the delay. On the sixth day of their stay in Vienna (she was lying on a sofa in a splendidly-furnished room that looked out upon the broad, grand Danube flowing majestically through the city, and her friend for the first time had left her a few minutes alone) this impatience grew almost too great to be borne. She buried her head in the sofa-pillows, and the wailing plaint for mamma came now and then, with heavy sobs, from her child's heart. This continued for some little time. When she looked up again, trying with the vain endeavor of a troubled child to stay her weeping and think no more of her sorrow, L'Estrange was standing at the head of the sofa looking down on her. His arms were folded, he stood perfectly still, and there was on his face a look of such fixed and hopeless sadness that, child as she was, she recognized it suddenly. Her own tears ceased to flow, and for a moment she looked back into his face as if, with the angelic intuition of her age (I wonder if angels do whisper these secrets to the little ones?), she would find out and understand what was the great woe that oppressed him. Then, as if she had come to a partial understanding, she raised herself on the sofa and tried with all her small strength to draw down his dark, weary-looking face to the level of hers. He yielded to the sweet compulsion; kneeling beside her, he suffered her to lay his head on the sofa-pillow and draw his cheek to hers.

It was a very simple mode of consolation. She only whispered again and again the name he had taught her to call him, and pressed her childish lips to his forehead, and stroked back his hair with her small, hot fingers; but it was very effectual. The dark look left her friend's face. It was as though "a spirit from the face of the Lord" had visited him.

He lifted the little one into his arms and held her there for a few minutes, then, with a softness of tone and manner which none but the pure child could awake in him, he told her a part, at least, of his trouble. It was in the form of a parable. "Laura," he murmured—the darkness was gathering, and two or three stars had begun to shine out in the sky—"look up: what do you see?"

"The sky, mon père; and now, ah, see! the stars are beginning to shine—one, two, three. I can see them in the water too."

"Do you know what it is that makes them so bright, fillette?"

The child shook her head.

"No, ma mie, nor do I very well, except that it is a transparent, beautiful something we in this world call light: what this something is I know not; I can only tell that the light is very good. Now, shall I tell you a story that came into my head a little minute ago, about the stars out there and the light?"

"Yes, yes!" Laura clasped her hands with delight.

In the joy of one of her friend's own stories even the trouble about her mother was for the time forgotten.

He stopped as if to think. How often in the long after-time, when L'Estrange was to the child only the memory of a strange dream, when the knowledge that womanhood brought threw its light on this part of her life, did Laura remember his look that evening. Even then, in her childhood's ignorance, it touched and charmed her, till all unconsciously she clung to him more closely and trusted him more fully. He was looking up. The fitful twilight was playing on his broad, massive brow, and on that brow was rest. But in the deep-set, passionate eyes, in the quivering lips, the struggle could still be read. A longing seemed to look out from his face—a longing that held and enchained him till it could be satisfied.

They sat by the window, L'Estrange in a deep arm-chair, the child in her favorite position on his knee. And after a pause, during which they were both looking up, watching how one star after another lit its small lamp in the sky, he began in a dreamy tone, rather as if he were speaking to himself than to any listener: "They are all alive; yes, must it not be so? for every body has a soul. Those bright ones that walk in light amid the ceaseless music of the spheres are instinct with the mystery that we of this world call Life. And why should this not be? for life consists in the power of movement and volition. Surely they move. Science proves that they revolve evermore in their grand orbits, and surely they *will* to shine, for it is only when we need their light that the light appears. Yes, it is true—these bright things live. They suffer pain, they know delight as well as we."

Then, as the clasping arms of the little one recalled him to the remembrance of her presence, he smiled: "I promised a story, and ma fillette will scarcely understand such philosophy yet. It was a prelude to the tale. Listen, then, ma mie. Those bright things up there are alive. Each one has its spirit, a being more beautiful than we of earth can conceive. I must describe them, must I? Hélas, bébé! I fear it is beyond me. I must tell, then, of things that have not for me the beauty they once had—the golden dawn, and the silver twilight, and the freshness of early youth, and the mildness of sunset skies. Put all these together and thou hast a part only of the fairness of these beings, who were placed by God thousands of ages since in the bright stars up there. The spirits were given a work to do. They were to shine when the sun, who was made to be king over them all, had gone away to rest behind the sky. The stars were glad when they were told to shine, for they were all good, and this shining, which is for the good of our dark world down here, made them happy. Little children who look, as ma fillette is doing now, at those stars up there, feel glad when they see the light, but they do not know that the stars are glad too—that when they shine out in the night they are singing aloud for joy."

Laura looked delighted, and put out her hand to stop her friend for a moment: "They must be singing now. Oh listen! Perhaps we shall hear them."

But he shook his head and smiled: "No, petite: long ago, when there were very few people, this music was heard. Now there are too many noises; but if any one could hear it would be such as thee."

Then he stopped again, and there came a sad look into his eyes. "There are more stars up there than we can see," he went on, "for some are not allowed to shine. They lie in the night like dead things, but still they are alive, for sadness is in their hearts, and this sadness is greatest now when all the others are shining and singing out for joy."

Laura's eyes looked sorrowful. "Why do they sing so loud?" she asked; "they might be sorry for the poor little dead stars."

"Some of them are so far away that it would take them thousands of years even to know that the light of the poor dead stars had gone out, and so they cannot tell that their singing makes the dead stars sad; but those who are near are sad, and sometimes even try to help. My story is about one of the dead stars. He was meant to be a beautiful star, for his spirit was great and strong, with mighty wings and eyes piercing like those of an eagle. Every day he knelt before God's white throne, which is quite in the middle of those stars, and every night he shone out into the darkness with a fair and glorious shining, and sang more loudly and sweetly than any. But there came a time when the star-spirit grew tired of this happy life: his light shone less brightly than it had done, his voice was sometimes missed from the night-chorus. A change had come over him, and this was what had caused it. There had come to him at a time when he was resting idly on his wings in that dark azure above—it was too early for his light to be shining, and he had left the crystal throne—a being until then unknown to him. It was dark and mournful, with black plumes covering it from head to foot, and nothing of light about it but a last remnant that shone from its eyes. This was the spirit of darkness, whose dominions had been invaded and conquered by light. The spirit of the night let her black plumes fall, and the star saw she was beautiful—with a beauty that did not belong to the light, it is true, but that still possessed a wild charm of its own. It was fascinating to him, perhaps, because unlike anything he had ever seen before."

L'Estrange was getting past Laura, but he had almost forgotten the child, and she listened, not understanding much, but entranced as she might have been by some bewitching melody. Her friend paused for a moment; when he continued his voice was low, and its tones were more sad than they had been:

"The star-spirit and the spirit of the night met many times, and at each time of their meeting the light of the star waned fainter. At last, when the fascination with which she surrounded him had reached its full force, he forgot, or omitted purposely, to light his lamp and shine with his companion-spheres in the midnight heavens. Terrible things happened that night, for our star, which was very bright and large, had been well known upon the earth.

"Sailors had given it a name of their own, and often, when the sea was all round them and they could not tell where they were, looking up they had seen this star, and its light had guided them. On this night the sea was running high, and as usual the sailors had looked up for their star, that they might know no rocks were near. Think of their despair when they found it not! Ah! there was one great ship full of women and little children. The sailors had lost their way. They looked up for the star which had guided them so often: hélas! its bright shining was swallowed up by the darkness. They took a wrong path in the waters, the big ship struck upon a rock, the women and little children were drowned. The star-spirit did not know this. He felt no sadness that night, for the spirit of darkness was with him; yet the next night, when he would have shone out in his place, he found that the power of shining had gone from him—that his star was a dead star in the sky. Ah, mon Dieu! to tell of his sadness! He would have no more to say to the night-spirit who had tempted him; he shut himself up in his dark star; he waited, waited, night after night, thinking that the power and gladness of shining might come back. It did not come; even, it seemed, his star grew blacker as the ages passed, as if the dark spirit were wrapping it round in her heavy plumes. So sad a change! No little children looking up to him, no weary traveller blessing him for his help, no pleasant music sounding from him in the evening; nothing but darkness, sorrow, misery. The stars went singing about him, and he lay there still, all his gladness gone out of him—a dead star in heaven. At last there came a night when the singing was louder and more joyous, and the spirit of the dead star, who had been hiding his head for shame at his darkness, looked out to see what it meant. A baby-star had been born into the sky, and all its sisters and brothers were rejoicing over its birth. The spirit of the dead star saw that its light was very near where his had been. It was feeble, but clear as dawn. The sight of the tiny light recalled to him the time when he too had shone out, a new joy and gladness, into the sky, and folding his wings he wept, as only spirits can weep, for a time that we on earth should call years. Perhaps his weeping made him better. It is impossible to say; but suddenly in the midst of it he heard a sound. It was clear, like the dripping of water from a fountain; it was silvery, like the ringing of bells in the distance. The spirit lifted his head from his folded wings, and there—even in his habitation, in the dead star whose light he had been—stood a beautiful child-spirit, her head drooping, her snowy wings folded over her breast, a small lamp in her hand. When the spirit of the dead star looked at the child she trembled, as if with fear at her own boldness; so the spirit could not be angry, although he knew this was the baby-light that had caused his weeping through those long dark years. Indeed, as he looked up he began to feel love stirring in his heart; the child-spirit was so beautiful and good, and her voice was like music. For she spoke when she saw she needed not to fear. 'I have come to stay with thee,' she whispered, 'for thy darkness and silence made my heart ache, and I have been praying to come for all these years. At last I have been allowed. Must I go away into the darkness?'

"He was moved with the child-spirit's humility and love. He rose, and towering above her in his grandeur gathered her up into his breast. 'Thou shalt stay with me for ever,' he answered. It was the night-time. Even as the spirit spoke he became conscious of a certain gladness unknown to him for the ages of darkness that had passed, and the everlasting song and music grew suddenly louder and more joyous. The child had broken the spell of night's spirit, she had brought him of her light, and he was born again, feebly but truly, into the sky."

L'Estrange stopped and looked down with a half smile, then his brow contracted. Laura had been listening breathlessly. She could not understand his tale, but its strangeness charmed her. "Is that all?" she said with a long-drawn sigh.

"Not quite all," he answered; then, as if to himself, "the end has yet to come. They were very happy together," he continued after a few moments' silence, "the spirit of the star that had been dead, but was gradually being restored to life and gladness, and the child whose presence had wrought the wonder. Once more the spirit of the star bowed down by day before the great white throne, and the child went with him; her angelic purity made her welcome there. But one day when they returned there was sadness at the heart of the spirit of the star, for he had learned that the child who had restored him was not to be left with him for ever; she had another work to do. He looked at her. *She* could not be sad, for, unlike the other spirit, she had never sinned, and perhaps this made his sadness the greater. Then it had been sweet to shine and sing with his companion-spheres, and he hardly knew how he would be able to shine and sing alone. But he would not keep her back. Another one, sad, it might be, in his darkness, wanted her, and with the life and gladness his child-messenger had brought him love. So"—L'Estrange's voice sank—"he let her go, his beautiful, his God-given—he let her go."

He said no more. For a few moments there was deep silence between them. Something of his sadness and a knowledge of its cause had penetrated the child's soul through his parable. Her eyes filled with tears. She looked up at the starry multitude, shining out now in their full glory above her, with a new love. At last she spoke, laying her head against his breast: "But, mon père, the spirit of the star shone out still?"

He answered sadly: "Mon enfant, I know no more."

CHAPTER IV.

MOSCOW.

> Mind's command o'er mind,
> Spirit o'er spirit's, is the close effect
> And natural action of an inward gift
> Given of God.

Laura was much better the next day; indeed, the improvement was so great that her protector considered himself justified in pressing on for another stage of their journey. She was not so joyful as might have been expected. Perhaps his parable had calmed the little girl, making her impatience less by the hint of possible separation. Laura cared very much for her friend. She had become so united to him in thought and affection that she could scarcely imagine a future without him. We must remember that with little ones, especially when their natures are impressionable like Laura's, it does not take long for these attachments to be formed. With them habit passes quickly into a necessity. It was thus with Laura. She had become so accustomed to her friend's protecting tenderness that she could not bear to think of being separated from him. But Laura was not untrue to her mother. She thought as much as ever of her return to the little cottage by the sea. Only in thus far her dreams and ideas were changed. She could not and would not think of that return, of those pleasant days when mamma would be happy and papa at home, without including in them all this kind guide who was planning their happiness.

Her friend's look at the end of his tale had been so sad that she dared not ask for an explanation, and indeed her own little heart had been almost too full of sympathy with the bereaved star-spirit for her to think of much else at the moment. But to this one thing in her after reflections Laura made up her mind: her friend should go back with her to her mother, he should not look so sad, they would make him as happy as they would be. In fact, the child mapped out the future, as many of her elders will do, in those long days of travelling that succeeded their stay in Vienna.

They were very long and very wearisome, unbroken by incident of any kind; the very passengers became few, and the towns scattered as they advanced. It was not difficult to get a carriage to themselves, but certainly some comforts were necessary to make the long journeys tolerable. Laura, however, had no relapse. At every possible resting-place her companion watched narrowly to see if fatigue were taking any effect upon her. He was reassured. The child slept, ate and made herself happy.

L'Estrange was not so fortunate. Anxiety, suspense, and a certain vague uneasiness of conscience concerning even this late delight—which seemed to have aroused the latent good that was in him—kept him wakeful, and by the time Moscow was nearly reached the faithful child noticed that he looked pale and ill. She told him so with a sweet womanly concern that sat strangely on her child's face. But he only smiled, and said rest would set him right. Evening had fallen on the earth when at last Moscow the long-desired dawned on the sight of the wanderers. It was from the midst of a desolate country, bleak and half cultivated, that it rose suddenly, almost, as it were, by magic, its glittering cupolas and myriad towers visible long before the city itself came in sight.

L'Estrange, who knew all about this strange appearance (he had travelled through Russia before), pointed it out to the child. Very little could have surprised Laura much at this time; she had been living ever since she had left quiet

Middlethorpe in an atmosphere of wonders; but amongst them all this arrival had been looked to as something preeminent. For Moscow was the city where this wonderful father was hiding. Laura was fully convinced that he would be the first person they should meet in the streets, and it did not seem unnatural that Moscow itself should be strange as any of the wonders in the Arabian tales. Perhaps, Laura reasoned with herself, it was because it was so beautiful and wonderful that her father had remained there. She had heard of people who had gone to heaven, not wishing to come back, and vaguely she blent the two ideas together till the feeling in her mind was something like this: Moscow was like heaven, so beautiful and delightful that those who went there never wanted to go home again.

The first sight of the ancient city was enough to justify her dreams. It was to the child like a glimpse of Fairyland. Once at the window, watching the gradual approach, out of the pale evening light, of those dim, ghostly giants that lifted their stately heads from the surrounding dimness, nothing would persuade her to leave it.

They drew nearer and the darkness gathered, so that Laura, though straining her eyes into it, could see nothing. When they arrived finally, and drove into the enchanted city, its wonders were hidden by the dim, gray night of the North. From the magic and dazzle that through the twilight had shone many-colored on the background of sky, they passed to a hotel exceedingly like the others at which they had put up.

It was a death to the child's first illusion. Her companion watched her curiously. He noted how the dazzle of expectation and wonder died out of her eyes, and how the real, growing weariness began to assert itself after the excitement which had veiled it for the time. They were together in the handsome, stately saloon—alone, for travellers at this season were few; the short, bright summer of the North was nearly over, the evenings were becoming gray, the nights black and dreary. There was a large square black monument in the room they occupied that emitted a close heat, and the process of shutting out carefully all external air had begun.

L'Estrange seated himself on one of the massive couches and drew the child to his side. "What is it, petite?" he asked as he noted her disappointment.

"Where is papa?" she questioned sadly.

"We shall look for him to-morrow."

He threw off his hat as he spoke, and the child saw that his face was very weary-looking and sad. Fatigue, anxiety and want of sleep were gradually taking their effect on his strong frame, while the close air of the room in his weak condition almost overpowered him.

"Mon père," she said, clinging to him, "how pale you look!"

He tried to rouse himself: "I am tired, fillette."

But suddenly the pallor spread till his very lips were blanched. He sank back on the couch with a faint moan, yet even then the soul of the man was strong enough to conquer partially the physical weakness. He thought of her through the pain that was striving to master him; he saw her face of despair, though a film seemed to be gathering over his sight, and with a strenuous effort he half raised himself, his pale lips parted in a reassuring smile: "I shall be better soon—water."

She brought it to him in a moment, all the woman in her risen to meet the emergency, and then she placed a pillow under his head and chafed his cold hands. By the time the waiter arrived to lay the cloth for dinner L'Estrange was better. It was a kind of spasm that had robbed him of his power for the moment. He had experienced something of this kind before, and it alarmed him; understanding a little about the science of medicine himself, he knew the danger of mysterious pains, and he felt that it would not answer for him to be laid up until his work was done.

When dinner was over they went out into the night together, and the cool air revived him; but afterward, when real solitude had fallen over everything, and the child had been committed to the care of one of the women of the house, the fear of what might come quite mastered him.

L'Estrange was no coward, to shrink from physical pain. Whenever it was possible he would escape suffering (though perhaps his real horror was rather of mental than physical pain); when it was impossible he met it like a man. But this time he felt his frame was weakening. The mental rest he had craved so passionately would never come till his work was over, and in the mean time another such paroxysm as the one through which he had passed might lay him prostrate. In this case what would become of Laura? How would he prove to his wronged Margaret that his intentions with regard to her were good and true?

Even as he thought he felt the pain approaching with stealthy creeping, like a thief come to rob him of his power. He rose with difficulty from the couch on which he had been lying, and opening one of his packages drew from it the small medicine-chest he always carried. His hand shook as he turned the key, for he knew what he was doing, and had it not been for his strange position would have dreaded it far more than the physical pain, which he felt it could not cure, only put away for a time. For L'Estrange had once been in the habit of putting into him this enemy to steal away his soul. He had felt then that his intellect was being weakened —that his bodily and mental powers were being destroyed; he had fought with the weakness and had conquered it.

But as he took out the little well-known phial, with its dark liquid, once so precious, he felt that another victory would be still more dearly bought, and he trembled. Necessity, however, is strong and knows no law. While he hesitated the pain gained ground.

Hastily he poured out a strong dose, drank it, and slept a heavy, uneasy sleep, broken by dreams and distorted images of reality, while through them all the keen finger of pain found its way, touching his heart and chilling its warm life. But even this semblance of sleep was better than the dismal wakefulness.

He got up better, and found that the pain whose ravages he had been dreading had left him. He sighed as he rose. An inner consciousness told him it was only for a time. Through that day the effects of the potion of the night followed him. Even Laura, child as she was, remarked the change. There was about her friend a certain languor, an absence of vital energy. He could scarcely rouse himself, even to take the steps needful for the accomplishment of the object that had brought them so far.

Toward the next evening, however, the effects of his dose began to lessen. He regained something of his physical energy, and in the gathering twilight started, without the child, for the address of the agent who held the information they required.

Laura had been restless and uneasy during the whole day, startled with the slightest noise, watching curiously all who came in and went out; for now that the time, as she believed, was very near for her meeting with this unknown father, she began to feel vaguely afraid.

"You are going to find him," she said as her companion came booted and cloaked into the room where she was sitting.

He looked at her earnestly: "And to give up my treasure."

She clung to him: "He won't take me away, mon père. We shall all go home to mamma together."

Her friend smiled, but he shook his head, and Laura's heart sank and the tears filled her eyes. She was too young for all this conflict of feeling. L'Estrange felt it with a sudden sense of compunction. He tried to comfort her as he would have comforted any ordinary child under the circumstances: "No doubt it shall be all as my little girl wishes."

But Laura looked up into his face with those mournful, searching eyes, and then turned away from him. In her simplicity she had read the hollowness of his efforts at consolation, and she was hurt that he should tell her anything but the truth. Her friend stooped down to her and took both her hands in his:

"You are a little witch, Laura. What am I to say to you, then?"

"I don't want you to say what I like," she answered in a low, tearful voice; "I want you to say what is *really* true." And then she began to cry: "I love you, and I love mamma —oh, so much!—and I think I shall love my papa when I see him. *Why* can't we all be happy together?"

"Why, little wise one?" He settled his hat upon his brows and turned away, leaving her unconsoled. "Ask the stars," he said from the door, and Laura was left alone to think and wonder, for young as she was the shadow that rests evermore on things human was closing her in its dark embrace. The why, the dark mystery of human fate, had already begun in her young soul its restless questioning.

Her friend felt this, and his heart ached for her, but the mischief was wrought—he could do nothing. Action was the only cure for their common sadness, therefore he would delay no longer. Hiring a droshki, he drove through the modern Moscow, while ever before him rose that mighty circlet of walls and battlements, enclosing its forest of towers, steeples and cupolas, gorgeous as an Eastern tale, fantastic as the dream of a diseased imagination, that city within a city—the Kremlin.

He was gathering together the forces of his mind, and this helped him in his task, for L'Estrange had ever been specially alive to the influence of externals. Beauty of form and coloring had always been able to sway his moods. This mighty monument, by strength formed and endowed, seemed to brace his spirit as he looked out upon it and thrilled to the memories it enshrined. The great impregnable, before whom Napoleon and his legions melted, the strong abode of the Muscovite giants—Ivan the Terrible and his court—the treasure-house of the Czars, the representative of the history of a nation destined to great things,—as he gazed upon it he felt the softness leave his heart. He was trying to be great, and this monument of human greatness helped him. He could not meet his enemy, although his words were to be, in a certain sense, peace, with the tender voice of a child ringing its sweet sadness into his ears, with the languor of sorrow and pain stealing away his strength.

And gradually as he drove through the shadowy streets, by the walled gardens and stone buildings, with the Kremlin rising ever before him in the distance, his mind took a stronger tone. Not as the wrong-doer, but as the representative of the wronged, he would stand before the man he sought, arraigning his enemy for the crime to which, as he well knew, his own conduct had lent a colorable pretext. L'Estrange could scarcely believe that it was anything but a pretext. Margaret's fault, if fault there had been, was so venial, her manner of life after the separation—and L'Estrange was too much given to intrigue himself to be able to understand how Maurice Grey could know nothing whatever of that—had been so pure, so single in its aims, that the harshness of her husband's judgment became great and vindictive in comparison.

L'Estrange found it by no means difficult to work himself up into a state of suitable indignation, and as he reached the door of the house indicated as that of the agent who held the knowledge of Maurice Grey's hiding-place, he was once more the dark, stern man, strong and self-contained.

His newly-formed resolutions were not yet destined to be fulfilled. Time and distance still separated him from Maurice Grey.

He had gathered from the conversation overheard in the Champs Elysées an approximation to the truth, though some diplomacy was necessary before anything could be wormed out of the crafty Russian.

The golden key opened his lips at last, and L'Estrange applied it liberally, but with a certain amount of caution, for he wished to be sure his information was accurate.

At last, however, the man was conquered, and perhaps gold was not the only or even the most potent agent. After many twistings and turnings and sundry circumlocutions, which their common tongue, the French language, so supple and delicate, could ably render, the wily Russian told his visitor all he wanted to know. The English milord—so he styled Maurice, probably because his pockets were well lined—had been in Moscow, but had only remained there two days. He had put up at his house, for he and the Englishman had met before, and their relations one with the other were of the most friendly character; also, Mr. Grey disliked hotels: for some reason he had seemed to desire the incognito. Monsieur had unfolded to his friend his intention of wandering, and under these circumstances had appeared to be in some perplexity about his letters, which he wished sent to another address than his own. He (M. Petrovski) had come to the help of monsieur (his readiness to help travellers, more especially, perhaps, the English, had always been very great), proposing that all communication with England should be carried on through himself.

He did not say that as he was a kind of property-agent this was altogether in his line of business, and that for everything he did he was amply paid. Probably the Russian thought it well to leave something to the imagination. And in this he was wise. L'Estrange's imagination was all-embracing, in his species more especially. He understood the position at once, and added so largely to the profit on the transaction—demonstrated so clearly how in the whole matter he would be a gainer—that the Russian's tongue, as by a species of intoxication, wagged more freely than ever.

His small black eyes glittering above his hawk-like nose and long, dark beard—he was a Russian Jew—he proceeded to assure his guest that nothing but his full assurance of the fact that only friendliness was intended to his dear friend Monsieur Grey would have persuaded him to open his lips on the subject.

And L'Estrange entering into his motives and approving heartily of his reticence, he showed his sincerity by leading him to a little side-window which commanded the ante-room, and bidding him look out carefully without allowing himself to be seen.

L'Estrange obeyed. He looked out, and treasured up what he saw for further use.

It was a large, bare room, containing only a table and two or three chairs. On one of these, in full relief, for the light from a small oil-lamp shone on his face, sat a young man. He was evidently English, and very young, almost a boy, for his face was clean shaven and his short fair hair curled over a broad, open brow, upon which time had as yet written no wrinkles. But what L'Estrange chiefly remarked in those few moments of intense study was this: the earnestness of his face, the purpose that shone out of his eyes, the manliness of his bearing and attitude.

He turned from the window to find out how it was that this young Englishman had been shown to him so mysteriously, and the Russian, who had been observing him narrowly, took him by the arm: "The young man has come by appointment on the same errand as yourself: apparently he is very anxious —for some time since he has pestered me with letters. Mark my confidence. I ask *you* how I am to treat him?"

For a moment L'Estrange was perplexed, then suddenly came back to his mind the remembrance of the lawyer's letter. This was Margaret's messenger. He looked out again. Perhaps the manliness of the young face pleased him; perhaps he saw in this strange search an access to his strength—an instrument that he might use to confirm the absolute truthfulness of what he was about to tell the mistaken husband; perhaps he had a certain compunction at the idea of sending on a fruitless search this young, disinterested champion of the woman who seemed to win all hearts. Whatever might be the cause, the effect of his second look was this. He turned from the window with a half smile: "Tell him what you have told me, my good friend, but keep him about here for some days."

The Russian bowed his assent, and after a few more courteous words preceded his visitor to the door. How had L'Estrange obtained this power over a nature so mercenary? Not by money alone, for others could hold out the same inducement—Arthur had been ready to pour out gold at his feet—nor indeed altogether by his superior diplomacy, though that no doubt had contributed to bring about the result.

That there are certain men who have an extraordinary power over their fellows is indisputable. Strength of purpose and character may be an element in the formation of this power, but it is not altogether alone. Such knowledge of the workings of the human mind as L'Estrange had gained by means of keen observation and long study of his fellows is perhaps the strongest element of all. For L'Estrange knew how to take men, what chord to strike in their natures, often strange and complex, to make them answer to his hand—how to render them actually desirous of doing his will.

CHAPTER V.

A GLIMPSE OF MARGARET'S CHILD.

> To look upon the fair face of a child
> Feels like a resurrection of the heart.
> Children are vast in blessings; kings and queens
> According to the dynasties of love.

ARTHUR, then, had found his way to Moscow. After days of wandering, after vain efforts to entrap the wily Russian into sending him by letter the information he desired, after keen and hungry searching in the English quarter of every city through which he had passed, he had gained the dim metropolis of the North, but only to be forestalled, to have a watch set upon his movements, to play into the hands of the man for whom, in his youthful enthusiasm, he cherished the bitterest contempt, the most undying enmity.

Perhaps under any circumstances it would have been impossible for the impulsive, straightforward young Englishman, headlong in his pursuits, whether good or evil, to understand the complex, two-sided nature of such a man as L'Estrange. Knowing what he did of him, it is scarcely a matter of surprise that he felt his strong young arm tingle at times to fell him to the earth, and if he should never rise again, so much the better—there would be one villain the less in the world. All he desired was to meet him face to face.

But Margaret had laid her commands upon him. His enemy, her enemy, was to be respected. The remembrance of her words made Arthur tremble, for in the holy indignation of his youth he felt that if they should meet it would be difficult to restrain himself from dealing the well-merited blow.

He consoled himself with the reflection that words have power to slay. And words were ready on his lips for the disturber of Margaret's peace, the maker of her misery, which in his inexperience he believed must go to the heart of the worst villain that ever lived.

Arthur did not confine his search to Maurice. Wherever he went strict inquiry had been instituted for the dark foreigner and fair-haired English child. At Paris, as has been already seen, his agent was upon the traces of the pair. There they had been lost altogether, for L'Estrange's ruse had succeeded, and never again had Arthur or the agent he employed been able to recover them.

The only consolation that could be derived from the chance encounter in the Champs Elysées was in the relation that appeared to exist between the child and this man. He was evidently kind to her, for the agent, who reported their conversation accurately, told of her indignation when he so foolishly began to abuse her friend, and also of her little cry of delight when she saw him reappear.

In the long letter which Arthur was writing to Middlethorpe that evening he related this incident, scarcely knowing whether or no it would be a comfort to the bereaved mother—whether she would fear the strange influence which this man seemed to have acquired over her child, or be thankful that at least he was treating her kindly. In any case, of one blessed fact she might rest assured—for the child's companion had been seen, and dark as the night was the agent had recognized the original of Margaret's miniature—her husband was innocent of this last, this bitterest wrong and humiliation. *He* had not removed his child from her care. The letter was addressed to Adèle, but it was written for Margaret. It told of that evening's interview, of his wanderings up to that moment and of his further hopes.

He had ascertained Maurice Grey's hiding-place—that is to say, the address was promised—but days of travelling would probably be necessary before he could reach it. Arthur, however, was full of courage and hope. He looked upon the success of his enterprise as only delayed, not put from him altogether. And his young, strong spirit of devotion shone out in every line of the letter which was to find the two lonely women watching and hoping—*their trust in him.* To know this was enough to brace the young man's mind, to drain him of self-love, to make and keep him strong and pure.

He was in the heat of composition that evening (it must be confessed, in spite of Arthur's literary dreams, the pen was not his strong point), laboring to express enough, and not too much, of the hope his partial success had generated in his mind—to give his friends new courage without buoying them up with false hope; striving to give his devotion to Margaret the delicate expression that might mean what it really was, and yet not offend or alarm her; trying to consider duly the feelings of his cousin and future wife—to prevent her from being in any way hurt by his absorption in that which concerned another; and through it all making his travels and adventures appear in the most interesting and favorable light.

The combination was anything but easy, and once or twice Arthur threw down his pen in despair. To frame a letter satisfactory in every way seemed a hopeless task. On one of these occasions, as he was casting his eyes round the room for inspiration, he was startled by the sound of the door being softly opened. He looked round. A little girl, dressed for travelling, was standing on the threshold and looking at him earnestly. When she saw his face a cloud came over hers, and she looked very much inclined to cry.

Arthur got up and went to the door, the kindliness of his nature aroused by the sight of the child's distress. She threw off her hood then, and shaking back her golden curls showed him one of the loveliest child-faces he had ever seen; but it was not its loveliness that made him start back with a sudden exclamation; it was a memory which that face recalled.

In a moment he gathered his ideas together—where had he seen her before?—and then, with the rapidity of thought, that last evening in England, Margaret, the miniature, the child's likeness, came before his mind. Fate had been kind to him. Margaret's treasure was within his grasp.

Unfortunately, the idea agitated him so much that he could scarcely act with the necessary coolness.

Laura had come into his room by mistake. She had lost her way in the great house, and was looking for her friend, whose room, though in another wing of the building, resembled in position that which Arthur occupied.

Already the child was alarmed by his sudden exclamation. She retreated hastily to the door, but Arthur caught her by the arm and tried forcibly to detain her.

Then Laura really cried, and the young man, between his earnest desire to secure her and his distress at her tears, scarcely knew how to act. He tried gentleness, coaxing her by all kinds of bribes to remain with him, only for a few minutes; but the child grew the more frightened; crying bitterly, she tried with all her small strength to loosen his grasp on her arm. It was in vain, and Laura in her despair called aloud for help: "Mon père! mon père!"

Arthur began to think they had all been mistaken, that her father had actually taken her away, but he had scarcely time to come to any conclusion, for as he was still struggling with the child, drawing her into the room with gentle entreaty, there came a dark figure into the gloomy, unlit passage. Arthur was too much absorbed to see him; Laura did, and with a sudden wrench she tore herself free from the young man's grasp. The strong right arm of her friend received her, while before the young man could recover from his surprise (he was at the moment stooping forward to catch the small retreating form) the left hand thrust him back with such violence that he fell, and lay at full length on the floor of his room. Before he could leap to his feet he had the mortification of hearing the key turned in the lock, and of knowing that as his room was in a remote part of the house, Laura and her protector, whoever that protector might be, would have time during his forced inaction to put at least some of the tortuous streets of old Moscow between themselves and his pursuit.

Arthur's position was ignominious in the extreme, and very difficult of explanation. Rubbing his bruised shins, he thought over it woefully. But thinking would not mend matters. He rang the bell violently.

No one came. Probably his violence defeated its own object. A long hour passed, in which, his letter forgotten, he paced the floor of his room, stamping and fuming like an imprisoned lion.

At last a waiter came. He was a Russian, naturally rather timorous, to whom even French was an unknown tongue; and Arthur, from the other side of the locked door, had great difficulty in making him understand in what consisted the obstruction to its opening.

To tell the truth, his stamping and fuming and stormy ges tures of impatience had alarmed the poor man considerably. He had always possessed a strong opinion about the violence of the English character, and it was only with many an inward tremor that, seeing the thing was inevitable, he slowly turned the key in the lock and released the young man from his prison.

His alarm was almost justified by Arthur's subsequent behavior. The delay, the ignominious failure, the blow from the hand of the man he so keenly despised, had nearly maddened the unfortunate young Englishman. Thrusting the waiter to one side with such violence that he staggered back against the wall of the passage, Arthur rushed down the wide staircase, three steps at a time, and demanded an interview with the proprietor of the hotel.

The head man waited upon him, respectful in attitude, fluent in speech, but chuckling inwardly at the Englishman's discomfiture.

L'Estrange had given his explanation of the little scene, and it had been by the order of the head-waiter himself that the young man had been detained so long in his prison.

The flood of bad French in which Arthur poured out his indignation was listened to with quiet deprecation, and answered by a multitude of well-turned apologies; but when the young man moderated his tone, and began to think prudence would be advisable if he wished to get anything from the people of the house about the movements of those who had escaped him, he could scarcely be surprised that diplomacy, bribery and a harrowing tale of wrong proved alike unavailing. He was obliged to give up the effort in despair. Through all the polite assurances, the smooth phrases, the courteous attention of the head-waiter he could read incredulity and indifference.

Arthur spent that night in haunting the railway-stations to extract information from the officials, and in knocking up the drivers of droshkies, trying to make them understand that he wished to find out whom they had driven that evening. It was hopeless. They were very civil; Arthur made it worth their while to be communicative. They were ready with highly-colored accounts of their passengers of the evening, but amongst them all he could find none answering to the description of those he sought. He returned to the hotel baffled and worn-out, longing to leave Moscow at once (the hotel and the smooth-faced head-waiter had become so utterly distasteful to him), but detained by an interview for the following day. M. Petrovski had promised him some further details about the residence of his client. He professed to expect letters which would let him know the Englishman's final resting-place.

That letter whose commencement had caused Arthur such pleasant tremors of anxiety was abruptly concluded. He could not make up his mind to relate to his friends in all its ignominious details the incident of that evening, although he longed to let Margaret know that he had actually seen and held her child. Several times he even tried to frame an account of this his first meeting with the little one, but always in vain. He sent off the letter as it was, and curses not loud but deep followed the swiftly-retreating enemy who had foiled him.

L'Estrange did not altogether deserve them. He had purposely treated the young man gently. He might have dealt him a far severer blow, but that glimpse of his face had taught the man of the world something about his character and purposes, had made him respect the boy, and so long as he did not interfere with himself he was ready to spare him. Laura, however, and her share in the task of restoring the wanderer to his home and wife, L'Estrange reserved to himself. He would bring her forward at his own time, and in the mean while he would show this young man, brave with the temerity of youth, that his guardianship, if tenacious, was strong.

Laura had acted instinctively in the occurrence of the evening, but when it was over, when she and her protector were once more in the train, travelling rapidly southward, she was agitated at the remembrance of what had passed.

"Mon père," she said, clinging to him fearfully, "why do they all try to take me away from you?"

He looked down at her earnestly: "Because they know not how much I love thee."

The child clasped her hands: "I hope, oh I hope, papa will know."

"Why, Laura?"

"Because then he won't wish to take me away."

"But you, ma belle enfant—you will wish to go back with your father. Is it not so?"

"Back to mamma?" said the child. "Oh yes, mon père, but you must go too."

He looked down upon her with a sudden pain in his eyes: "Kiss me, fillette, put your arms round my neck. There, so—it is easier now. Little wise one, what shall I do without thee?"

Laura did not answer, only with her gentle womanly ways she soothed her friend, while in her small heart rose a certain determination. It was this. Not even for her father would she leave her friend. He should go back with them to her mother, for her mother could do him good. It was the determination of a woman, for a woman's tenderness and depth of feeling were becoming prematurely developed in the young girl, who would never perhaps in all her life be a thoughtless child again. Had she gained or lost by the exchange? It was for the future to say.

But my readers will be impatient; and truly it seems that in looking back on this strange story, which the past has evolved out of its mists, an undue prominence has been given to this part. It has been altogether unconsciously done, and only because of the enchaining nature of the subject.

There was something so touching in the confidence and affection of this innocent child's heart, that with the instincts of truth itself found beauty where others might have only been able to find its opposite; there was something so beautiful in the surrender of the strong man's soul to the guiding influence of the poor child, in whose tenderness the heavenly side of him had read a possibility of salvation for his whole nature; and in all the sweet mystery there was so evidently present the working of an unseen Power, preparing this man, who had missed his right aim in the world, for the reception of a pure ideal, for the vision of undying truth. Time presses. We must linger no more over the tender scenes that marked the intercourse between Laura and her strange protector, but pass on our way, leaving them together.

On the following day, while Laura and L'Estrange were putting vast tracts of country between themselves and the ancient city of Moscow, Arthur Forrest, jaded and worn-out by a sleepless night, and considerably discouraged at the total failure of this his first effort to restore Margaret to her own, prepared himself for another interview with Petrovski.

He wished to be calm and cool, for what, he said to himself, if he were to be sent on a fool's errand?—what if the man who had dealt him that mysterious blow could have been really Laura's father? He found it difficult on such a supposition to assign a motive for his conduct, unless indeed he could have heard of his search, and have believed he was simply an agent sent by his wife to entice the child back to her. On the other hand, what could have led L'Estrange, if it should be he, to Moscow?

Arthur was very much perplexed. He determined to call the calmest, clearest judgment to his aid in sifting the information which the agent was ready to proffer. Alas! when did an old head sit upon young shoulders? If ever they have been united, the combination has not produced such a pleasing whole as Arthur Forrest, who, in spite of the knowledge of this world on which he prided himself, was above all things young and confiding.

Petrovski might have deceived him, might have sent him to the antipodes, if he had seen fit, but his master in the art of dissimulation had advised him to be truthful. Arthur, therefore, after some days' delay, was told the simple truth—that Maurice Grey, disgusted with his life in St. Petersburg, had made up his mind to turn his back on society altogether. With this view he had sought the mountains, and had established himself, one servant his only companion, in a chalet hastily fitted up with a few necessaries in one of the higher Swiss valleys.

The agent professed to have just received letters from this remote point. In them Mr. Grey had directed that his money and business-letters from England should be sent to the hotel nearest to his temporary home, and this was the address which was given to Arthur, which had previously been given to L'Estrange.

By the following night's mail Arthur left Moscow. As may well be supposed, he lost no time on the way.

Of this strange flight through almost the entire breadth of Europe he never thought afterward save in the light of a feverish dream. It seemed like a vision. Sleeping and waking he was flying still, with all manner of various impressions, multitudes of scenes and strange faces, flitting before him like a kind of phantasmagoria. Glimpses of grand cities, appearing but to vanish, vast solitudes, uncultivated and barren wastes, mountain-country and soft pastoral scenes passed before him in an ever-varying succession. At last the train had to be left behind; he had gained the mountains, and with them a mode of travelling that seemed painfully slow and wearisome to his brain, in a whirl with swift movement and tumultuous thought.

Arthur was haunted through those long days, and, strange to say, it was not Margaret's face that haunted him, nor even that of his gentle cousin who was pining in distant England for his return. The lovely child's face followed him day after day and night after night. It reminded him of failure, brought back in vivid colors the memory of what he looked upon as a species of ignominy, and yet, do what he would, he could not banish it. The bright golden hair, the dark mournful eyes, the fair contour, the childish grace returned again and again.

At times it was like a nightmare. He would see the child, even touch her, and as he touched her she would vanish. Once or twice during those long nights of travelling Arthur seriously interfered with the comfort of his fellow-voyagers by his strange proceedings. Reaching forward at one time, he would seize upon the hand or knee of the person who sat in front of him, laying himself open, if the individual were of the feminine order, to serious misconception—if of the masculine, to a rude rebuff and rough awakening; at another he would passionately grasp the window-blind, giving rise to an irresistible titter among those of his companions who did not find sleeping in a train such easy work as he did. But whenever Laura's face came before his mind, in sleeping or waking moments, Arthur looked at it with a strange reverence. To him it was scarcely a child's face. It seemed almost as if behind the fairness and beauty there was a meaning.

Arthur could not analyze character. He did not sufficiently understand human nature's diversity to be able to explain to himself why this child was so different from other children, but he felt it; and stronger almost than his longing to restore Maurice Grey to faith in his wife's perfections became his desire to rescue that child from him who had taken her, he firmly believed, with some bad motive, and to lead her back to her mother.

The strange thing was that she loved this man (for Petrovski had so impressed Arthur with a belief in his veracity that once more he had settled with himself the identity of Laura's companion). Could it be, then, that there was some good even in him? But Arthur would not follow out this line of reasoning. He was more than ever confirmed in his hatred of L'Estrange.

"There is something in the Bible," he said to himself, "about Satan putting on the form of an angel of light. This man has only followed the example of his forerunner in all evil. He is deceiving the innocent darling, and she thinks him good."

He was driving in an open sledge—for the season was late and snow had begun to fall on the mountains—when these thoughts crowded in upon his brain.

It was tolerably cold in these high latitudes, but the young man was wrapped up in a fur-lined travelling cloak, the thick leather apron of the sledge covered his knees, and a cigar emitting fragrant blue clouds, whose ascent into the pure air he watched curiously, was between his lips.

Arthur Forrest had not been bred in Belgravia altogether in vain. He understood very thoroughly how to make himself comfortable.

In this thing he considered himself fortunate. The crowd of Britons that yearly fill the Swiss solitudes with their all-engrossing presence had fled at the first breath of winter, "like doves to their windows."

Two or three hardy Swiss returning to their mountains, an adventurous German desirous of studying the aspect of Switzerland in winter, a Pole who wished to put the mountains, soon to be an almost impassable barrier, between himself and his enemies, the vigilant and all-powerful Russian police,—these, with a conductor and driver, formed the whole of the small cavalcade that crossed the St. Gothard on this bleak autumnal day.

In spite of the glorious scenes through which they had been passing, the beauty of Italy rising into the grand desolation of the country that belongs to the snow-kingdom, and that again descending into the awful grandeur of rugged precipices, hissing torrents and shaggy pines, the little party was gloomy. The Pole shivered, and folding his fur-cloak around him cursed the ancestral enemies of his race; the Swiss rubbed their hands, stamped their feet and looked defiantly at a threatening storm-cloud that was rising up behind them; the German tried to get up a shadow of enthusiasm. He stared, with what was meant to be earnestness, through his spectacles, emitted a series of "wunderschöns and wunderhübschs," and strove dutifully to think that this was seeing life and entering sympathetically into Nature's most secret joys—the joy of the torrent, the delight of the snow-whirl. Perhaps it was scarcely matter for surprise that his enthusiasm left rather a dreary effect upon the minds of his companions.

Arthur was the only one who really enjoyed, for this was novelty to him, and in his fashionable life he had long been craving for something out of the common. Then, too, there was about this kind of travelling a certain necessity for endurance which braced his nerves. He was doing this for Margaret, and as each keen blast of wind, sweeping with biting force from the ice-fields, touched his young face, he felt the blood tingle in his veins. He was full of satisfaction, strong to endure.

With an Englishman's insight into possibilities he had forgotten nothing that could possibly conduce to an approximation to comfort in such a situation as that in which he found himself. This being so, he was able to enter more thoroughly into Nature's strange caprices, as exhibited in this land of wonders, than the sentimental German, who shivered in a threadbare coat. For—there can be no doubt about it—physical comfort frees the mind: when the body is irritated by discomfort, the mind, sympathetic, is occupied by itself.

In the intervals of meditation on his plans and further attempts for Margaret, and efforts to take in and write upon his brain some at least of the wonderful combinations of form and coloring through which they were passing, Arthur looked with a dreamy philosophy at his fellow-travellers.

The young man was inclined, from the depths of his magnificent cloak, to wonder lazily why Providence had bestowed the world's allowance of common sense upon our nation. The experience of foreigners which he had been gaining during those weeks of travelling had only confirmed Arthur in his preconceived idea. One and all they were absurd. The absurdities might differ in kind and degree—this the young man would not attempt to deny—and no doubt there were clever people among them; still, as a rule, were they to be compared to Englishmen?

He looked at the sturdy, commonplace Swiss, the shivering Pole (only half a man he pronounced him), the sentimental German, trying so conscientiously to enjoy, and with a feeling of self-gratulation that actually helped to send a warm glow through his frame answered the question by a decided negative. No wonder they pronounced the young Englishman supercilious; he had intended to be very condescending. From the heights of his superior nationality it was so easy to look with a calm pity upon those who had been less highly favored by Nature. It need scarcely be considered matter for surprise that they regarded his condescension in another light, and were inclined to repel his spasmodic efforts to be very pleasant and friendly.

All the travellers were glad when the foot of the mountain was reached. Even the indefatigable Arthur, when he found himself so near his destination, thought it well to take a night's rest at Amsteg, where he broke off from the St. Gothard route for Meyringen and Grindelwald. It was somewhere between these two places that the chalet occupied by Maurice Grey was supposed to be situated.

Once in the neighborhood, the young man felt that it would not be difficult to find it. The very fact of a stranger having made for himself a lonely habitation in the mountains would be sufficient to render his home a celebrated place.

Arthur's only difficulty now was what it had been at York before his interview with Margaret—the framing of some reason which might account for his seeming intrusiveness He formed a thousand plans. He would wander in the direction of the chalet, he would put himself in the position of a benighted traveller thrown on the hospitality of the hermit; finally, he determined to torment himself no longer—Fate would perhaps befriend him as before. That evening Arthur sent another letter to Margaret and his cousin. There was not much in it of the impressions which the grand scenes among which he was sojourning had written on his mind, but it held a courage and hope that might inspire the lonely wife and bereaved mother with a kindred sentiment.

Arthur was an inexperienced traveller, and the plan of his route had been principally traced in obedience to the suggestions of the few English people he had met. It is more than possible, therefore, that the route chosen was not the most direct; for although it had not been possible for L'Estrange in any way to emulate his swiftness in travelling (he was obliged to suit himself to Laura's capabilities), yet on that night when, from the small village in the valleys, Arthur sent his second letter to Margaret, the child and her protector were already at the address given by Petrovski, in the close vicinity of the child's father, of her friend's most bitter and unrelenting enemy. She was utterly unconscious of the strange position, though a change had come over her in those last days of travelling. There was about her even more of the sedateness of the thoughtful woman, still less of the child's merry unconcern. For the shadows that had threatened this young life's joy were gathering thickly around her. She was in the centre of emotions too strong, of a life too earnest, for her tender youth, and her friend saw with concern how the color faded from her face, how her brow grew transparent, how the quiet gestures of a woman became more and more habitant.

But he could do nothing; the mischief had been wrought in that hour when his passion had overpowered his judgment, when he had consummated the rash deed of taking a tender little one from the mother's fostering care. He had done what he could to obviate the evil, and in the interval the child had grown dear to him as his own soul. This it was that added a tenfold poignancy to the pain with which L'Estrange sometimes looked at her.

Once or twice in the course of this later journey L'Estrange had further accesses of the pain he dreaded, and more than once he had been forced to resort to his kindly enemy, entrancing opium, to stay his fierce pangs for a time. It produced its true effect upon him. Moments he had of joys too great for earth—moments when his imagination played freely, when his heart expanded, when all the dark places of his past life's journey were irradiated with a golden light, and when the growing uneasiness of the present strangeness and the certain future pain passed into calm security and pleasant rosy dreams. But the false potion brought other moments in its train—moments when his whole being seemed weak and nerveless, when deep depression possessed his soul, when even the higher life and nobler possibilities of existence which he had been learning in the child's pure presence became to his languid soul unattainable as the dreams of a weak visionary.

At such times he would sit with folded arms and knit brows looking out and away to the far stretches of horizon that were fleeing evermore before them. Only the child had power to arouse him from one of these gloomy fits of abstraction, though sometimes his mood was so dark that even she scarcely ventured to break in upon it. But she never really feared him; there was a strange sympathy between the two that made her understand him in some wonderful way.

As they neared the end of their journey and rest became a possibility, L'Estrange once more tried to refrain from his death-winged potion. He felt that languor and weakness were possessing themselves of his being, and strength of mind would be more needful than strength of body for the work he had to do.

Only those who have known what this refraining means can understand his sufferings. Racked with pain, that reckless gnawing pain which seems to be verily eating into life, he lay for two nights and days on a bed in the hotel at Grindelwald, where he had decided to remain for a few days. And still during the long hours the patient child, his ministering angel in very truth, sat by his bedside helping her friend to bear, and waiting for him to be better.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LIFE OF A SOLITARY.

And soon we feel the want of one kind heart
To love what's well, and to forgive what's ill
In us.

MAURICE GREY had at last been successful in his weary seeking after loneliness. Whether he had gained happiness thereby is scarcely so easy to say; certainly his surroundings could not possibly have been more beautiful or peace-inspiring.

On an Alpine meadow green with a vivid brightness, spangled in the spring and early summer with many-colored fragrant flowers, bounded on one side by a wood, the home of ferns and moss and lovely things of every shape and hue, overtopped on the other by a ridge of mountains that, rising sheer from the soft greenness, towered into white ice-fields and shoulders and pinnacles of virgin snow, he had found in the summer of that year a tumble-down chalet. It was large and tolerably commodious, evidently intended to be something superior to the ordinary dwelling of the Swiss herdsman.

Maurice Grey was tired of hotel-life when he came upon this treasure trove. Life in the mountains, with the constant companionship of ignorant tourists, would-be enthusiasts and *blasé* fashionables (for Maurice, though touched and charmed by Nature's beauty, had not arrived at the higher point of seeing beauty in humanity), was scarcely the life of solitude he had been seeking.

In the inane vapidity of travellers' talk all the impressions which Nature's loveliness had been writing on his soul seemed to pass into cynicism and irritability. He would get away from the charmed circle—he would break loose once and for ever from the galling fetters with which his kind would chain him. This chalet was the very thing to suit him. He had come upon it in the course of a long, solitary ramble which was taking him into ground untrodden apparently by the ordinary tourist. It led to no point of special interest, there was nothing remarkable to distinguish it from thousands of

Alpine meadows in the vicinity, it was intersected by no well-frequented path.

Maurice Grey set inquiries on foot. He found that the neglected chalet had been intended for a small pension; that the proprietor, who was a farmer, had sustained an unexpected loss in cattle, and had thus been unable to complete and furnish it; that he would be only too delighted to let it on very moderate terms to any one who would take the trouble of making it habitable.

On the very next day Maurice found out the farmer, and an arrangement was entered into highly to the satisfaction of both. It took a very short time to fit up the small abode, or two rooms on the ground floor, with the few articles an Englishman would find necessary—a wooden bed and a large bath, a table and chair, one leather-backed arm-chair, rough shelves with a selection of books that he had ordered in one of the German towns through which he had passed, writing-materials and his beloved pipe, sole companion of his solitude.

These were all, save the kitchen utensils, which his new servant, a German who could do everything, had procured for him, and with these Maurice Grey settled down to a hermit's life. It was scarcely the life to suit him. There was too much vigor and manhood in his frame, too many cravings in the heart he had thought dead, for the death-in-life of one cut off from the society of his fellows to be bearable for any length of time. During the long hours of the day, when even his servant was absent seeking at the nearest village for the daily necessaries of their life, Maurice Grey, the sociable, lively Englishman, would sit like a patriarch at the door of his tent and look out—not on his children and children's children playing on the green sward, but on the savage grandeur of the mountains, on shaggy pines rising head above head like a great army on the hillside, on the flash of torrents, their fall scarcely heard in the far distance, scattering their white foam into the sunshine, on radiant ice-rivers sweeping down between dark gray rocks. And the wonder entered into his soul. But the illusion faded, for, all grand and glorious as it was, there was yet in it nothing to lay hold upon the heart or satisfy its wants.

Sometimes the stillness would grow so oppressive that even the tinkling of the cattle-bells, notifying the approach of the sleepy, quiet animal, would be a relief to the man's brain And then he would rush into the wood. There was sound enough there—the rustling of leaves, the chirping of grasshoppers, the movement and ceaseless murmur of life various and multiform.

At times Maurice Grey would enjoy it, but not always, for in the midst of this rich profusion of Nature his was a life apart. More than once he was mortified, even in those first days, when solitude had a certain novelty, to discover how instinctively his step would quicken and his heart grow lighter when in the evening, his hour for dinner drawing near, he could look forward to seeing at the door of his chalet the familiar face of his servant and only companion. He was too proud, however, to betray himself even to Karl, and in spite of everything was determined to persevere. He would give the new life a fair trial. Happily, Maurice had a resource in his pen. In his youth he had cherished ambitious dreams of distinguishing himself in the world of letters. In these hours of solitude the desire returned—not, indeed, with a like force, for the cry of the miserable, the *cui bono?* of a sick soul, was at the heart of it.

If the grandeur of Nature could inspire him with high thoughts—if as a poet he could breathe out any one of these, sending it forth a living image of beauty into the world—why and for whom should he do it? For men and women? For *their* enjoyment, *their* false praise? Maurice Grey, as it will be seen, had not lost his cynicism in his solitude. But he wrote as he had never written before. He transcribed his strange, wild dreams that were formed in the ice-caverns, and clothed the woods and hills with legends, dismal, gloomy, awe-inspiring, that had drunk from the bitter waters of his own dark soul.

As days and weeks passed on that soul grew darker. Even the faithful Karl, who was strongly attached to his English master, began to fear his strange moods and wonder vaguely at his caprices, recalling the weird märchen that had fed his boyhood in his Black Forest home—of men haunted with the spirit of evil, condemned to wander for ever, seeking rest and finding none; of ghosts that had taken to themselves a fleshly home, and living with human beings had been considered human themselves, till the dark fear of betraying their origin in some unwary moment had driven them to the wilds, there to batten on horrors till the startled flesh should forsake, once and for ever, the naked, shivering ghost.

Karl grew afraid of his own shadow. Indeed, only his visits (and he took care they should be of daily recurrence) to inhabited places kept him sane and capable. So absolute is the truth, old as humanity itself, that "it is not well for man to dwell alone."

For Maurice Grey where was the helpmate to be found? Not upon earth, if perfection such as he sought in his lofty idealism was to be its necessary accompaniment. He had broken his idol for a flaw in its fair whiteness, and what wonder that he found it difficult—nay, impossible—to replace it?

Not that Maurice, to do him justice, had ever sought to replace his idol by any creature outside of him in the world of men and women. It may be, however, that his dream was wilder and more vain. For he looked within instead of without—looked to the poor trembling self for that satisfaction and peace which life with one who was (though he had not known it) verily his other self, by reason of her tenderness and warm womanly sympathy, might have brought him.

Maurice and Margaret had been alike wrong in this, that they had sought in the transitory and fleeting what is impalpable and enduring. Happiness springs not from the dust, and happiness abiding is only to be found outside of ourselves, outside of humanity, outside even of the world.

This they were learning, the husband and wife, each in the secret place of a stricken heart—learning it with stormy seas and vast plains and snow-clad mountains between them. Sometimes it would dawn upon Maurice, in the midst of a dream of impossible bliss, that he had been seeking the good in a wrong channel—that perhaps it might be found when and where he least thought to meet it. And the idea would make him tremble as with a sudden inspiration his eyes would seek the blue vault above, so restful in its calm transcendent purity.

And so the long summer months, laden with beauty, passed by him. Days he had of musing, when his soul, entering in upon itself, would strive painfully for the secret of Nature's abiding joy—days of inspiration, when after a restless night dreams and imaginings would shape themselves into burning words which he would trace with a poet's tremulous joy—days of moody abstraction, when even the blue heavens irritated him by their calm beauty, when the white snow-peaks glared and dazzled and robed themselves in dark palls: days too he had when a better spirit seemed to be taking possession of him, when the spirit of good brooded over his soul, when from the everlasting pæan of hill and vale, of rustling leaves, rushing torrents and tuneful birds the shadow of a peace that might yet be his descended on his soul. And still Karl came and went, leaving the hermit in the morning, returning with early evening, ministering to his necessities and preventing him from feeling the hardships that might have been his lot in the strange life he had chosen.

If the truth must be told, the imaginative German half expected at times, as he entered the dark gorges which led to his master's dwelling, to find that in his absence companion-ghosts had spirited him away. But such an occurrence never happened, and the man began to take heart and breathe more freely.

Unhappily, the summer-time could not last for ever. Autumn came, and on this particular occasion an early autumn fell upon the valley. Bleak winds began to moan and sigh among the hills, the mountains robed themselves in gray, impenetrable mist, the leaves shuddered and fell by myriads.

Maurice Grey was an Englishman. He had always prided himself on his independence of externals, but hitherto he had been well occupied, mentally or physically, in such a season. This coming on of autumn was very different from any former experience. To be absolutely alone, or shut up with a servant who only at intervals shows a scared face; a blanket, damp, white, clinging, about the house, and entering in by every nook and cranny; nothing visible but walls of chilly vapor rising in billowy folds about dark, formless giants, that are known to be snow-mountains only because they have been visible before,—is sufficiently depressing; but add to all this a mental life unhealthily alive and sensitive, an absence of present joys, with the memory of past happiness rising at times to mock the heart by its fairness, the sting of a remorseful conscience, physical powers fast decaying under the unspeakable horrors of a lonely, unloved life, and I think it will be allowed that Maurice Grey would have been more than human if even his intellect had not begun to fail him.

It was such a morning as that I have been describing; he sat before his desk; his pipe was on the table before him, books were scattered on every side, a manuscript was open, the pen was in the ink; but he was doing literally nothing, not even attempting to beguile his dreariness with that friend of the forlorn—a pipe. His folded arms rested listlessly on the table; he was looking out into the thick mists with a dreary hopelessness that in a man seemed miserable beyond compare. He was not even thinking. It was as though a gloomy abstraction had seized upon his soul.

The door grated on its hinge—it was not particularly well hung—but Maurice did not hear the sound. He was like a man who was under the influence of some strong narcotic, plunged in visions that shut out the external world. Karl was the intruder. He peeped cautiously into the room, took a back-view of his master's position, then steered noiselessly round to the front (Maurice was painfully irritable in these moods) and gained a side-view of his face. It resulted in an ominous shake of the head and a bold move. Creeping still nearer, Karl touched his master on the arm, then sprang back, for the angry frown gathered on his brow.

Karl had been observing him, and Maurice had a vague fear that in his moody fit he had been ridiculous. An Englishman hates to be absurd, even to a valet, and Maurice Grey, as he glanced at the repentant German brimful of apologies that were only waiting a suitable outlet, felt his choler rising. "How many times have I ordered you," he said angrily, "not to come in here without knocking?"

"Meinherr did not hear," replied the submissive youth.

"Then you should have knocked again or gone away. By Heaven! do you think me incapable of taking care of myself? Speak, idiot! what is the meaning of this intrusion?"

The frightened German extended his arms apologetically: "Meinherr must condescend to hear that, as this weather has lasted some days, we are nearly out of provision."

"Go to Grindelwald to-day."

"Impossible. Meinherr will please to take the trouble of observing how thick are these mists."

"Then why, in the name of all that's sensible, do you annoy me? Can I make provisions?"

"No, but meinherr might wish to know why his table shall be so poorly provided this day, and—" The man hemmed.

"And—what? Go on, can't you?"

"Meinherr should also know that weather like this at present never lasts very long about here."

"So much the better. Is that all you wished to tell me?"

"Meinherr would for the few days be so much better at the hotel. If he should please we might go there to-morrow and rest till the weather shall be a little more clear. There are not a great many people travelling just now. Meinherr would have a good apartment and would be very little annoyed."

The poor man's voice trembled with fear and anxiety. It was one word for his master and several for himself. Karl was beginning to feel that he could scarcely bear another week of such horrors as those to which he had lately been exposed. His master himself, by his dark moodiness and mysterious surroundings, peculiarly awe-inspiring, his only companion; the dark gorges and mountain-caverns yawning round him like so many graves; no creature to whom he could unfold the tale of the fears that beset him,—nothing less than such a combination could have emboldened the submissive Karl to make the proposition which he had advanced in so timorous a manner.

After the murder was out he stood silent, aghast at his own audacity, waiting for the torrent of angry words with which the Englishman would answer him.

To his surprise no such answer came. Maurice rose from his seat and burst into a loud laugh. The diversion had been salutary: "You would make a first-rate special pleader, Karl. A word for me and a dozen for yourself, eh? Well, what are we to do? Some one must be left in charge here. Since you are so anxious about my welfare, I had better go to Grindelwald and leave you behind me."

Karl smiled pleasantly. Matters were taking a favorable turn.

"Meinherr is pleased to joke. He would most certainly require the services of a valet in Grindelwald as well as here, and no one else would understand his ways so well. I spoke —it is perhaps a few days since—to an old woman who is well known in the village. She would be very glad for a small sum to look after the chalet. Meinherr will excuse this liberty. I feared for him the severity of the winter season."

"All right, Karl. Poor fellow!" he added, gently, "I fear you lead a hard kind of life here, and you are a faithful servant. Well, let it be so. You shall have a little change."

By these sudden flashes of kindliness, these glimpses of a better nature, Maurice had endeared himself to his servant. To be harshly treated was too common to the German to be in any way food for complaint, but for a master to consider him, to take a kindly interest in his feelings, was something quite new. His heart warmed to this proud Englishman who was considerate enough to give him his due meed of thanks and praise.

At Maurice's last remark he pressed eagerly forward, his eyes glistening: "Not for worlds if at all inconvenient to meinherr. What is good enough for him should, it is quite certain, be good enough for his servant."

Maurice smiled: "I begin to think you are right, my good Karl; a change will do me good, as well as you. I left a portmanteau at the hotel, so we shall not require to take anything with us. If by to-morrow the mist has at all cleared we shall start for Grindelwald."

The next day rose bright and clear. Maurice and his servant left the chalet early in the morning, locking the door carefully, as Maurice had a deep regard for his books and manuscripts, and taking with them the key, which was to be given to the old Swiss woman, destined heiress to the horrors of the lonely place.

Happily, Marie was endowed neither with an overflow of imagination nor highly-strung nerves. With her small grandchild to wait upon her, and plenty of coffee, sausage and black bread, she could be happy anywhere.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORK OF MARGARET'S MESSENGER BEGUN.

Sometimes we feel the wish across the mind
Rush like a rocket tearing up the sky,
That we should join with God and give the world
The slip; but while we wish the world turns round,
And peeps us in the face—the wanton world!
We feel it gently pressing down our arm.

MAURICE and his servant reached the hotel in safety. Its situation was fine, though not to be compared with that of the Englishman's chosen dwelling. It was perhaps too much shut in with the great giants that enclosed the valley in their apparently indissoluble embrace, too much under their shadow for their true grandeur to be felt. In the summer and early autumn it was a busy place, for it was a favorite resting-point and suitable centre for many excursions. But at this time, as Karl had wisely predicted, it was nearly empty. The flock of guides who during the summer months had been accustomed to haunt its approach had gone home to their families and their winter-life among the herds of cattle and goats; the *dépendances* were entirely closed, and many of the windows of the hotel itself showed white blinds and a general appearance of being shut up for the time.

Nevertheless, in the village of Grindelwald a slight commotion seemed to be on foot, of which the hotel was apparently the centre. Curious men in white ties were discussing volubly with the few rough outsiders who, in the vague hope of further spoil, were haunting the outskirts of the hotel with bare-backed mules and alpen-stocks; from the little shop where carvings and views were temptingly exhibited the ancient proprietor was looking curiously across at the hotel; and the village people were gathered together in small knots, evidently discussing some object of common interest Into the midst of this excitement Maurice Grey and his servant walked quietly about noon on this bright autumnal day.

Karl pricked up his ears. "Something has happened, meinherr," he ventured with the familiarity of a favorite attendant; then, perceiving no sign of disapproval, "Travellers lost in yesterday's mist. Ach! wie schrecklich!" he continued, lapsing into German as exciting scraps of one of the many conversations reached his ears. "Meinherr has without doubt heard. 'Il ne peut pas se consoler.' An Englishman, it may well be, who has lost his son, perhaps even two. Will meinherr permit that I make inquiry?"

Maurice could not help laughing at the man's overweening curiosity. "Ask about my room and luggage first," he said, "then you may do as you like."

But by this time the landlord had seen the Englishman, and had advanced, hat in hand, to ask his pleasure. The rarity of new arrivals in this season made an extra coating of politeness desirable.

"Is anything wrong?" asked Maurice when the trivial matter of accommodation had been settled.

The landlord answered in French; he had never been able to acquire English: "Ah, monsieur, a sad event indeed; but come within and you shall hear of it. We are idle now, and my people have nothing better to do than to talk about these things. Better not—better not," and he shook his head seriously.

"But why?" asked Maurice, his curiosity aroused. "Is there anything particularly mysterious about this event, which seems to have excited you all so much?"

"Mysterious! Monsieur has truly chosen a right word to describe this occurrence."

And he proceeded to pour into Maurice's ear some account of the sensational event which had that day formed the one topic of conversation in the little village.

It will be as well, perhaps, to take the story out of his hands and to give in a few words a *résumé* of what, with interruptions and circumlocutions manifold, the landlord made comprehensible at last to his new guest.

It seemed that a few days before the Englishman's arrival several travellers had put up at the hotel, apparently with the intention of staying there some time.

The first party consisted of only two, an elderly gentleman who appeared to be in a bad state of health, and a child strikingly lovely if the impassioned description of the landlord was at all worthy of belief.

They took three rooms *en suite*, and the little lady was to be constantly attended by one of the chambermaids.

Later in the same day the second party arrived. It consisted of two gentlemen and a lady, all of whom gave Austria as their country. The lady, a peculiarly proud and beautiful woman, seemed to be the wife of one of the gentlemen, but they both treated her with a tolerable amount of carelessness.

For two days these different families had remained in the hotel without meeting or having any intercourse one with the other, for the elderly gentleman had been suffering so acutely that he never left his room, and the child would not leave his side.

On the third or fourth day he appeared at the *table d'hôte*, accompanied by the little girl, and seats were placed for them exactly opposite to those occupied by the Austrians. The lady and one of the gentlemen were already seated when they entered.

One of the waiters, it appeared, was a particularly observant character, though, indeed, there are always observant characters at hand when such are found convenient, and a waiter's life at some large hotel is specially favorable to the cultivation of this habit of mind. Many a waiter might frame exciting romances, the materials drawn simply from the sphere of his own observations. The waiter in question was German, a man of an inquiring turn of mind, and specially given to the study of character. Some peculiarity of countenance, as he afterward declared, led him to look rather attentively at the dark, handsome face of the Austrian lady. Lost in his favorite study, he forgot to notice, by the necessary bustle, the drawing out of chairs and readjustment of knives and forks, the entry of the elderly Frenchman and his fair-haired child. He could not, therefore, have been mistaken in his assertion that as the lady lifted her eyes from her plate and caught a glimpse of the new arrival, her face became suddenly convulsed. She started violently, first flushed crimson, then turned as pale as death.

This circumstance made the intelligent waiter think. He turned his attention instantly from the strangely-affected lady to the apparent cause of her agitation, but here he was partially baffled. There seemed to have been a kind of flash of recognition in the face of the gentleman with the iron-gray hair as he seated himself opposite to her; even this, however, was so slight that possibly he might only have imagined it, for the Frenchman's conduct during the time allotted to dinner was absolutely natural. Once or twice he even looked across at his companions with that quiet species of scrutiny which is allowable between perfect strangers meeting in this way, and several times he addressed himself in French to one or other of the gentlemen who faced him. The lady made no further sign, only to the far-seeing German she seemed to be making a violent effort to control herself. On the evening of that day something—he did not explain what—led this particular waiter to the part of the house in which the suite of rooms taken by the gentleman (who will have been recognized as M. L'Estrange) was situated. He stated afterward that he had been chained to the spot—the spot being the outside of the door of the Frenchman's apartment—by strange and unusual sounds. He heard a woman's voice, interrupted often with tears and sobs; she was speaking in tones of entreaty or expostulation, raising her voice violently from time to time as her excitement grew with her theme. What that was the waiter could not precisely say. He was an exact man, who never liked to go beyond his authority. In fact, as he was eminently practical and had never cultivated his imaginative faculties, perhaps he chose the easiest course.

Stern, low tones answered from time to time the woman's impassioned appeals, and at last, very suddenly as it seemed, the door was thrown violently open, and cloaked and hooded, her face covered by a thick black veil, there walked out the proud Austrian lady. He recognized her by her exceptional height and her stately carriage.

The door was closed softly from the inside, and the lady walked rapidly through the passage to her own rooms, which were situated in another part of the house.

This happened two days before the arrival of Maurice. In the night the lady had disappeared. A French waiter went at the same time, whether as her attendant or not no one could discover. One thing alone was certain—the deed had been cleverly done. During the whole of those days the lady had been sought, but sought in vain.

"We thought her husband careless," said the landlord in conclusion, "but ever since he has been like a madman. We dare not tell him what monsieur knows about the conversation that has been overheard: the life of the French gentleman, who seems still very ill, would scarcely be safe; and, after all, who can say? He seems to have acted well. A woman's caprice, an old attachment. Monsieur will doubtless be of my advice. It would be useless to arouse ill feeling without just cause."

And so saying, the landlord shrugged his shoulders. Why should he affect himself at all with the miseries of forsaken husbands or runaway wives? It is an ill wind that blows nobody good, and the landlord, to speak truly, was not discontented with the kind of notoriety which this romantic tale, told and retold as it might very probably be—especially if the *dénoument* should turn out to be tragic—would bring upon his house.

Maurice Grey read something of this in the man's eyes, and in his turn he shrugged his shoulders, a sign with him of bitter contempt.

Not "What fools," but "What knaves these mortals be!" was the constant cry of his sick soul. It was meeting him again as he emerged from his solitude.

When the landlord left him to answer some summons, Maurice Grey looked out upon the mountains, and laughed a laugh that was sad to hear, for under the mirth lay a weary weight of misery and bitterness. Women inconstant, man faithless—everywhere self-interest the great ruling motive of life, and in all the green earth no spot where he could lay his head, feeling "Here I may rest with a perfect confidence." The man's heart contracted painfully; from such a standpoint as his the outlook on humanity is gloomy indeed. He felt for a moment that he would fain be out of it all. The frank, round face of Karl aroused him to a sense of his position, and to the recollection that while such simple souls as his were left all honesty had not passed away from the earth. It was certainly a relief.

"Meinherr's rooms are ready, his fire lit and his clothes airing. Will he please to see if everything is to his liking?" said the German.

"Where is my room?"

"In the best part of the house, eccellenz, close to the apartments occupied by the gentleman of whom he has doubtless heard."

"The inconsolable husband?" Maurice's lips were curled into a kind of sneer as he asked the question.

"No, meinherr; the other person concerned, as they say, in this sad business—a Frenchman, I believe."

"So all these details are the common talk of the place," said Maurice to himself. "Unfortunate man!" And then he set his teeth together. "I acted wisely," he muttered; "such a scandal as this would have killed me."

He said nothing more to Karl, and the honest soul, who had rejoiced in the interest his master was taking in sublunary affairs, who had been congratulating himself, in fact, on the very rapid success of his plan for drawing his master out of his dark moods, was distressed and perplexed to see the old frown gather on his brow, to hear his fierce, impatient sigh, and to find himself banished summarily from his room with the curt abruptness to which Karl had become accustomed.

Left alone, Maurice sat down by the little wood-fire, which had been kindled solely in consideration for his feelings as an Englishman, and returned to his sad pondering. He was playing a dangerous game with himself, for he was in that mood which has often tempted a man to tamper with his humanity—to put out his rash hand and experimentalize on the nature whose fearful beauty and hidden mystery it is impossible for him to understand. It would have been better, a thousand times better, for the Englishman at such a moment as this to have thrown himself into any kind of work, to have sought society, however humble, to have looked for some interest in the outer world; anything would have been better, indeed, than this giving way to the spirit that possessed him—this looking for and searching into what no son or daughter of humanity may fathom. Like a fiend's temptation ran backward and forward through his mind, haunting him with its dull rhythm, the burden of a song that he remembered to have heard in some bygone time:

"A still small voice, it spake to me—
Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be?"

And again, with an added force—

"Thou art so steeped in misery,
Surely 'twere better not to be—better not to be."

As he repeated these words half aloud, Maurice rose and paced the room excitedly.

"Yes," he said to himself, "a wise counsel. Men, women, what are they?" He knit his brows and his eyes looked fierce. "What are we?—miserable, and our misery makes us bad. God!—if there be a God!"—he lifted his pale, agitated face, but underlying his wretched, wild doubts might have been read there the reverence of a fine soul—"why are we miserable, seeking good for evermore, and finding evil, inconstancy, falsehood? Why is our fair world the abode of fiends incarnate, who burden the ages with their folly? And if we were happy"—again he lifted his pale face, and the dazzling snow-peaks against their azure background met his gaze—"if we were happy," he repeated slowly—"if *she* had been happy—O God! she would have been good, for the soul of purity was in her; but misery brings madness to the blood and thoughts of evil to the heart; and for misery there is no cure under the sun."

For a few moments he remained perfectly still and silent, his arms folded, his brow contracted, looking out upon the snow-fields; then added, this time half aloud, "*But one!*"

He turned from the window and cast a rapid, hungry glance round the room. It was comfortably arranged, the small wood-fire crackling merrily, the clothes he was about to wear hanging on a chair beside it carefully brushed, his bed turned down, exhibiting the whitest of white linen; but what specially drew Maurice's attention was his portmanteau, which, after the necessary articles had been taken from it, Karl had left open, that the expediency of further unpacking might be decided by his master. It was a large travelling portmanteau, evidently full of a miscellaneous collection of articles—books, dressing-apparatus, clothes, curiosities picked up in wandering from place to place. On one of these curiosities, which was lying near the top of the open side, Maurice's eyes finally rested.

For a moment he gazed silently, then crossing the room took it up in his hand to examine it more closely. A case containing a pair of small pocket-pistols, the barrels of silvered metal richly chased with gold. One of these Maurice removed from its covering. He handled it with a certain curiosity, took it to pieces to examine its condition, cleaned it with the most delicate care, then, after putting it together again, spent a few moments in listening to its click. It looked more like an elegant toy than a dangerous weapon. Maurice put it down and returned it to the case, which contained, besides the companion pistol, a small flask of gunpowder and some bullets. These he took out, then in a quiet, leisurely manner proceeded to load the pistol. His attitude was rather that of a man who is amusing himself, trying to kill time, than of one who has any serious purpose in view. And perhaps at this moment Maurice was scarcely serious. In any case, when his work was done he did not proceed farther; he put the pistol down again. It almost seemed as if this quiet, ordinary occupation (for Maurice's firearms had always been treated by him with minute personal care—he did not allow a servant to touch them) had quieted the tone of his mind and banished some of his dark thoughts. He put down the pistol then, and turned back to the fireside to resume his unhealthy musing.

For here lay Maurice Grey's error. Instead of mastering his morbid feelings, driving them away by stress of hard work and diversity of thought, he, like many a strong man before and since, suffered them to master him.

Again and again he would return to the old mystery, bringing the energy of his soul to bear upon it. Again and again it would elude him, till, mortified and baffled, tied down to the narrow circle of self-knowledge, a broad outlook on humanity impossible by reason of his self-chosen fate, he had come to loathe his very life as an evil thing.

It is easier to meet a foe in fair fight than a giant formed by a diseased imagination—blurred, indistinct, but awful with the terrors of the unknown.

With his small pistol within reach, Maurice set to work once more thinking over humanity's woes and wrongs, gloomily seeking for the shadow of a reason why life should be thought worth having—why it would not be well to pass out from it once and for ever through the lurid portals of self-destruction. What wonder that his unhealthy pondering should point out to him no ray of light, no gleam of hope?

But happily for Maurice, and for the many who were interesting themselves in his welfare, his mind at the time could bear no further tension. Rather to his own surprise, he found it wandering from the solemn question of life versus death to the common things that surrounded him. How strange it is that at the solemnest moments the trivial and commonplace intrude the most perseveringly! And yet it is a fact that might be proved by numberless instances.

Maurice's window looked out upon the hotel garden; gradually, as the tension on his nerves grew less, he caught himself counting and remarking curiously the very few who from time to time passed up and down the snow-shrouded paths and alleys. A woman-servant, apparently looking for some kind of herb; two waiters, who walked rapidly up and down as if enjoying the keen air and glittering sunshine; the landlady, in morning undress, crossing to the *dépendance* in the grounds, and returning with some utensil which had been left there accidentally; finally—and this it was that riveted Maurice's attention—a traveller, probably a new arrival, for the landlord had given Maurice a detailed account of all those who were in his house at the time, especially giving him to understand that no English visitors remained. And this young man was certainly from England. What other country could have produced the faultless exterior with regard to form, the fair freshness of face, the well-bred nonchalance of manner?

The young man held a cigar lightly in the tips of his fingers, his lively whistle penetrated to Maurice's retreat, he walked up and down on the crystallized snow with a resolute, energetic step; there was, to the eyes of the jaded man of the world, something peculiarly pleasant and attractive about his general appearance.

"I wonder who he is?" said Maurice to himself. "It would be rather pleasant to meet anything so fresh; he has a good face, too. That young fellow is no scamp."

Inconsistency of human nature, or rather, perhaps, adaptability to circumstances. Maurice a few moments before had been condemning his generation indiscriminately, calling men and women by the harshest names in the vocabulary, longing passionately to escape from them for ever. Appears upon the scene a young man with a fair, fresh face, and he endows him immediately with the qualities in which all his kind had been pronounced deficient! Strange, but true, for such is life, so complex a thing, driven hither and thither by trifles light as air.

Maurice Grey turned away from the window, looked with a half smile, half tremor at the loaded pistol, put it in a safe place lest Karl should see fit to meddle with it, and proceeded to dress himself carefully for the early *table-d'hôte* dinner.

And thus, though he himself was all unconscious of the fact, the work of Margaret's messenger was begun.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TÊTE-À-TÊTE DINNER AT THE HOTEL.

For how false is the fairest breast!
How little worth, if true!
And who would wish possessed
What all must scorn or rue?
Then pass by beauty with looks above:
Oh seek never—share never—woman's love.

MAURICE GREY'S costume was as faultless as that of the young man whom he had admired in the hotel-garden when at the strange hour of two o'clock P. M. he, in obedience to the summoning bell, peered into the long dining-room, at the extremity of which was a small table spread with two or three covers. Karl, his face beaming all over as he recognized his master, was standing behind the chair destined for him, the young Englishman was brushing his feet vigorously on the mat before the door that stood midway in the room, two waiters were hovering about helplessly.

Maurice took his place at one side, Arthur Forrest seated himself at the other side of the table. They were Englishmen and total strangers one to the other, therefore it is scarcely necessary to say that the places they chose were as far apart as the small size of the table would permit. And yet the two men were anxious to know one another—Maurice, because he felt that his companion's freshness would be a relief to his jaded soul; Arthur, because he had recognized in Maurice Grey the husband of Margaret, the man for whom he had been searching through the length and breadth of Europe.

Burning with anxiety to unfold his mission, he could scarcely preserve his composure now the fatal moment had arrived, now he and the man he had been seeking were at last face to face. For he could not be mistaken; he had ascertained from the landlord the name of this only other Englishman besides himself who had not fled from the valleys at the first breath of winter, and Maurice's likeness, confided to him by Margaret, had been too often studied in its every lineament for him not to be able at once to know its original. With the knowledge came an excitement that threatened to overpower him utterly; but he controlled himself. That calm self-possession and a certain amount of diplomacy were absolutely necessary if he would bring his mission to a successful issue, he felt most keenly.

Once Maurice caught the young men's eye scanning his face, and as the eyes met Arthur blushed; he felt, too much for his comfort and composure, that the slightest false move might be fatal. Maurice was utterly unsuspicious; he attributed his young companion's confusion to embarrassment at being caught exhibiting a little too much curiosity, and he was simply amused, determining in his own mind to find out more about the young fellow, so evidently a gentleman, yet so frank and transparent in his ways.

A few moments of delay passed by; then, as there was no further accession to the company, soup was served. Arthur, too full of tremulous excitement to be able to find a single commonplace, began to eat in total silence; Maurice looked across at him between the spoonfuls.

"Apparently we are to dine alone together," he said at last with a pleasant smile; "rather a different scene from the one I looked in upon a few weeks ago."

"I suppose this place is very full in the season," was Arthur's not very brilliant reply.

"Especially so this year; it is gaining in renown, and certainly the situation is good. But to me hotel-life is *so* distasteful."

Arthur was beginning to gain confidence. "Do you think so?" he said. "Now, I like it—abroad, that is to say; the people one meets are off their stilts, and generally inclined to be friendly; there is no bother, something approaching to comfort, and plenty of life and gayety."

"I'm afraid present circumstances will scarcely answer to your description," said Maurice.

Arthur laughed: "No, indeed, you and I seem to be the only sane people in the establishment. I gather from the waiters—one of whom, happily for me, speaks English—that the present company consists of an elderly gentleman, ill or out of his mind, certainly peculiar; his daughter, an angel of beauty and goodness; a fuming Austrian, scouring the mountains for his lost wife; attendant brother, similarly occupied; landlord, landlady, staff of servants."

Maurice smiled: "I think you have omitted nobody, only, for fear your expectations should have risen too high, even under circumstances so meagre, I should inform you that the angel of beauty is a child, a mere baby; but my arrival only preceded yours by a few hours, so, like you, I speak from rumor. Now, may I venture to ask how long you will be likely to stand out against such an atrocious state of things? I have an interest in the question, as I believe I am a fixture for some time."

It was by no means an easy question for Arthur to answer. He might have said that the time of his stay depended entirely upon Maurice himself. Not being able to give the true answer, he treated the question as lightly as possible: "Oh! I can scarcely say, exactly. I was recommended to come—mountains in winter, snow, and that kind of thing; they certainly look very well, but, you see, I am not precisely an enthusiast in that line."

"Was it for your health?" asked Maurice with grave interest, looking compassionately at the fresh young face, whose brilliant coloring might possibly hide disease.

This question made Arthur turn as red as fire. The knowledge of what his errand really was rendered him painfully self-conscious. "Why, no—yes—no, I mean," he answered, his confusion growing as he advanced.—"What a fool I must be!" he muttered to himself angrily; then, as he caught a faint smile, polite but perplexed, on the lips of his questioner, he controlled himself suddenly. "The fact is," he said rapidly, "I've been so desperately chaffed about this midwinter journey— But, you see, I rather like cold weather, and the air here is bracing."

Maurice saw his questions had been ill-timed, and with true courtesy proceeded to change the subject: "You would not have said so yesterday. Then, and for some days previously, it was anything but bracing up here. We had a fine blanket of cold mist about us—not a tree to be seen beyond the distance of a handsbreadth."

"I thought you had only arrived yesterday," said Arthur, a tremor in his voice. He knew perfectly well whence Maurice had come, but it was his plan to feign ignorance; he wished to draw him on to speak about himself.

Maurice smiled: "I don't come from very far. You must have heard from the people about here of the peculiar Englishman who shuns civilized places—I believe this is the form the rumors take—and lives by himself in a chalet among the mountains. That strange individual is before you now."

Arthur bowed, as in acknowledgment of this peculiar kind of introduction. "I must confess," he replied, "that Mr. Grey is known to me by fame, and being so far in advance of you I must ask you to be obliging enough to accept my card. If, as I suppose, we are to dine in this way tête-à-tête for some few days to come, it is as well that we should at least know each other by name."

"Thank you," replied Maurice cordially. He was at a loss to account for the timidity, the hesitation, the evident constraint of this young man, who was yet, to all appearance, no novice in the ways of the world; but he liked him and wished to set him at his ease.

"You have just come from England, I presume?" he said after a short pause, looking kindly into Arthur's flushed face. "*I* have been a wanderer for many years. How do you like this kind of life?"

"It has been pleasant enough," replied the younger man, reassured once more by his companion's friendliness; "but, do you know, I find nothing to compare with the comfort, the convenience—in fact, you know the kind of thing that one finds at home. Here one can't get even decent tobacco; there is nothing to be had in the way of drink but sour wine. As for the cooking, some people praise it very highly; but—" As he spoke there came up a little dish of vegetables swimming in butter. "Bah! they call *that* an *entrée*, I suppose."

Maurice laughed, and helped himself to the obnoxious dish: "You see what wandering does. *I* have become cosmopolitan in my tastes. From the sauerkraut of Germany to the caviare of Russia I am tolerably at home, able at least to pick up a living; but come, you are right about the wine, which I really think grows in sourness with the added degrees of frost; we might have better tipple than this, and it is an occasion. I have not done the social for many a long day. The 'Wein kart,' Karl. Let us order up the best bottle of champagne the landlord has in his cellar, though I greatly fear his stock is low. Karl, inquire for me—any first quality champagne left?"

The landlord's cellar was not absolutely empty. In a few moments a bottle of very excellent champagne stood on the table between the two young men. Maurice drained a brimming glass; Arthur would scarcely do more than wet his lips. He had not forgotten his purpose, and to bring it to a successful issue he knew it would be necessary to have all his wits about him. Laughingly, Maurice reproached his young companion for his abstemiousness, and filled and refilled his own glass with the glittering draught. For after the dull weight of loneliness, after the terrible experiences of the morning, after the gloomy musing that had oppressed him with its horror, this return, even transitory as he felt it to be, to some of life's amenities was a boundless relief to the man's soul. In the old happy days society had been Maurice Grey's life; it had intoxicated him like wine. Among his peers, when, soul meeting soul, the sparkles of wit, the flashes of gay humor had been struck out in the heat of social intercourse, he had reigned as a king: brilliant, vivacious, boundlessly hospitable, his society had been courted by the world, and he had met the world courteously, drawing out from its pleasures the extreme of good that was in them.

But misery had changed Maurice woefully, and it was only when the wine was in his blood, when its liquid fire was coursing through his veins, that he could return in any degree to his former self—that he could become once more the fascinating, brilliant, cordial man of society. On this particular occasion he had determined to forget himself. It was the flying back of the bow that had been bent nigh to breaking. Wine could make him forget, and he poured out glass after glass, draining them rapidly, as a man might do who was consumed with burning thirst. Gradually his eyes began to shine and his words to flow more readily. The haughty, self-contained man spoke freely of himself, and made a friend and companion of the youth whom hazard had thrown into his way.

Arthur listened silently, with a tremulous joy. If Maurice would confide in him his task was half done already. But love had taught the young man prudence. He would hear before he would speak; he would earnestly study the character of him he had come so far to seek before he would determine how and when his object should be revealed. Maurice, in this mood, was a marvellously agreeable companion. The younger man, standing, as it were, on the threshold of life, listened, entranced, to his descriptions of the great world, and Mr. Grey knew the world better than most men. He had plunged into every kind of society; he had feigned to be what he was not, that he might gain access to that which would otherwise have been denied to him; he had played upon the weaknesses of men and women, only to scathe them with his biting ridicule. Then too, he had seen the world from a variety of stand-points. During the first part of his life as a man he had taken a part in the careers which the great world offers to its votaries; afterward he had lived as a spectator: holding himself aloof from the heartburnings, the jealousies, the ambitions, the intrigues, he had been able more calmly to note and criticise. He had made undying enemies, he had knit to himself faithful friends, he had been concerned in strange histories; but all these things had been apart from himself. As far as his own feelings were concerned, they were nothing, feathers light as air, incidents *pour passer le temps*—nothing more. He was in the midst of a brilliant series of anecdotes drawn from his life in St. Petersburg, which had been fruitful in events, commenting lightly, even with a kind of sarcasm—for these things could not move Maurice Grey—on the enthusiasm he had excited in female breasts, and on the confusion and dismay which his mysterious absence would create, when the light began to wane, and the waiter came in to set a match to the solitary oil-lamp which was the hotel dining-room's winter allowance of light.

Maurice stopped and drew out his watch: "By Jove! young gentleman, your society is so fascinating that I had altogether forgotten the time. Do you know we have been nearly three hours at table? Now tell me candidly, have you any plan for this evening? I need scarcely ask," he continued laughing; "amusements are not in this primitive corner; if you went out to walk you would infallibly lose yourself, and as far as I can make out there are in the hotel at present no fair ladies to conquer; but so much the better for you. If I had my life to live over again, I would flee woman as I would the plague." His brow contracted. "I wonder why I talk about women at all. They are all alike false and fickle."

Arthur looked up. He was but a boy, and in presence of this man of the world, steeped to the lips in cynicism, it was difficult to express the strong faith of his young soul. But Margaret's face in its calm beauty came suddenly like a sweet vision before his eyes, and he answered, trembling slightly, "I am younger than you, Mr. Grey, and have had much less experience of the world; but I know that in this thing you are wrong. There may be some women who are bad and faithless, and all that kind of thing—there are ever so many more who are good and pure. Perhaps you have been unfortunate in your intercourse with women—perhaps—" his voice shook, and there was a sudden light in his blue eyes—"perhaps you have made some terrible mistake."

Maurice was earnestly intent on the business of lighting his cigar from the solitary oil-lamp, so that the look on Arthur's face escaped him, but the earnestness, the apparent meaning in the boy's voice, impressed him strangely. He turned round instantly, a slight appearance of surprise in his manner; then as he caught sight of the flushed face and gleaming eyes of his companion, he shook his head and his lips curled into something like a sneer: "My dear fellow, you are young. Wait a few years, and your vigorous championship will die down, withered by circumstances."

He laughed bitterly, and Arthur turned away, a cold feeling at his heart. He could not understand this cynicism. To him who knew this man's history it seemed cruel and wanton beyond compare.

But Maurice was good-natured, and he liked the boy; his very freshness, whose springs he had been trying to poison, pleased him. He took him by the arm and looked into his averted face. "Have I frightened you altogether?" he said kindly, "or will you listen to what I was about to propose?"

Arthur smiled his acquiescence, but it was with an effort; he felt in no smiling mood.

"If you like, then, let us adjourn to my quarters. This great place looks desolate with the one oil-lamp they generously allow us. There I have a jar of excellent whisky, and Karl will soon find us all appliances and means to boot for the concoction of whisky-punch, which, if you had lived so long in these inhospitable regions as I have, you would know to be a real luxury."

Arthur smiled: "I have not tasted a drop since I left England."

"Then you agree to my proposal? Come!"

The two men rose, Maurice linking his arm into that of his companion, and leaving the long dining-room, threaded the ill-lit passages which led to Maurice's apartment. The door of the room adjoining his was ajar, and close to its threshold they paused involuntarily for a second or two.

What made them stop was nothing more than a child's voice singing a child's hymn: an untaught, feeble voice, thrilling with melody that made it tremble, there was yet in it that which irresistibly drew and fascinated. Even in its weakness there was something strange. To the imaginative it would have seemed like a woman's heart trying to express itself through the feeble medium of a child's voice. For there was soul and purpose in the quavering treble that trilled against the air. With one accord the men stopped to listen, holding their breath lest any of the sounds should escape them. The voice paused a moment and they passed on, but before they had reached their destination, Maurice, who had been looking back toward the door whence the sound had proceeded, caught an instantaneous glimpse of the owner of the childish voice. A little golden head and fair face, on which light from within the room was shining, peered out and looked up and down the passage. Only for a moment, but in that moment the dark eyes of the golden-haired child and the dark eyes of the world-weary man met. The child, frightened vaguely, retreated to the inside of the room; the man staggered as if he had received a blow, and sank down, to his companion's dismay, pale and speechless on the nearest chair.

Maurice, it must be remembered, had been drinking pretty freely and in such a condition as his men are scarcely so well able to master their sudden emotions as they may be at another time.

The face of his child, the sound of the hymns her mother had sung at her cradle, was to Maurice like the dim memory of a fair dream. He did not for a moment recognize the child as his own; he was far from imagining that the little Laura was near him, and the look in her eyes, the expression of her features, the music of her voice, constituted a haunting mystery that absolutely staggered him.

He met her eyes, and suddenly, as in a vision, his wife's pure face, his child's cradle, all the details in their utmost minuteness of a home that had once been happy, flashed over his mind. He did not know how it had come. He scarcely even connected this sudden revulsion of feeling with the sight of the child's face; he only knew that it was there, a haunting memory of past happiness, and that his present pain was almost too great to be borne. Covering his face with his hands, the strong, cynical man sat for some minutes—minutes that seemed ages to Arthur—plunged in bitter thought.

When he looked up, Arthur thought his face was more haggard than it had been, and there was a certain excitement in his manner. He rang the bell vigorously. "You will say I am a pretty host, Mr. Forrest," he said lightly; "this is scarcely the entertainment I promised you."

Then, as Karl, who had been in the close neighborhood of the room expecting some such summons, appeared in the doorway, "Try and get a small kettle, two tumblers and a lemon."

In a very short time the required articles were in the room, and with his favorite beverage before him the frown passed from Maurice's brow and the gloomy abstraction from his manner.

He returned to the descriptions which his adjournment to his own room had interrupted, and Arthur was by turns convulsed with merriment, thrilling with sympathy, absorbed in interest; but Maurice's tales left a sad impression. There ran through them all the spirit of the preacher's bitter cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

"Yes, Solomon was a wise man," cried Maurice at the end of one of his vivid bits of description. "'One man in a thousand have I found, but a woman have I not found.'"

He flung down his glass with a laugh so bitter that it made his young companion shudder.

"You look incredulous," continued Maurice; "when the gray begins to sprinkle your hair you will come to the same conclusion. Look!" he bowed his head and showed the deep furrows that lined his brow, the white that shone out here and there from his dark hair. "I *could* have done great things in the world: a woman made me what I am—a wreck in every sense of the word."

The whisky was rapidly mounting to the man's brain. Maurice's cheek was flushed, his eyes glistened, but he recollected himself suddenly: "I am a fool to prate about my own affairs, God knows it were best to hide them; but, young man, you will understand it all some day." He laughed harshly. "Lives there a man who has not suffered?"

Arthur listened to his ravings, and as he did so the memory of Margaret's pure life, the echo of her noble words, shone out to him like light through the darkness of her husband's desperate words.

At first he felt his heart swell with indignation, but he looked at Maurice and the indignation changed to pity. "Yes," said the young man to himself, "to believe such a woman false must be enough to kill a man's faith in humanity."

He rose from his seat, and stood up before the world-sated man strong in the pure faith of his young soul. His companion had said he would understand this some day.

"Never!" said Arthur earnestly; "God grant that day may never come! I know women on whose constancy and purity I would stake my life." He was thinking of Margaret and Adèle.

Maurice looked at him curiously. For the second time he saw that in Arthur's face which made him think there might possibly be a meaning under his vigorous assertions.

"Life is not very much to stake," he said lightly—"more, no doubt, to you than to me—but I confess I am curious." The cynical smile which Arthur disliked was playing round his lips. "I have given you a chapter out of my experience; return it by giving me one out of yours. I should like to know more about those fair ladies—but perhaps they are *not* fair; that would make all the difference—upon whose integrity you would be ready to stake your life." Then his voice deepened and his brow contracted: "God knows I would have done the same once upon a time, but that is past, with other things."

There was silence between the two men for a few moments; then Maurice looked across at the young face, on which a shade of weariness was resting, with some compunction.

"Poor fellow!" he said gently, "I have done wrong. Faith is such a beautiful thing, and it lasts so short a time, I should have left you yours."

But Arthur looked up almost angrily: "You cannot surely think that *my* faith is weakened by anything you have said."

Maurice smiled. "Youthful infatuation!" he muttered. "But let me hear your story," he added aloud, "then perhaps I shall discover that unlike mine your faith is founded on a rock."

Arthur looked at his companion searchingly. The last words had been carelessly spoken, for the excitement brought on by wine and whisky was wearing Maurice out; fatigue and exhaustion were fast taking possession of him.

The young man read this, and he rose to his feet.

"I cannot tell you my story to-night," he said; "it is rather long, considering the lateness of the hour."

"As you will, my dear fellow." Maurice's eyes were nearly closed.

Arthur went to his own room, and when Karl appeared a few minutes later to take his master's last commands, he had great difficulty in persuading him of the desirability of undressing and lying down between the sheets like a Christian. He succeeded at last, and Maurice slept such a deep unbroken sleep as he had not known for days; but he woke with a racking headache and a general sense of dissatisfaction.

CHAPTER IX.

A TORMENTED SPIRIT.

Yes, all the faithless smiles are fled
  Whose falsehood left thee broken-hearted;
The glory of the moon is dead,
  Night's ghosts and dreams have now departed:
Thine own soul still is true to thee,
But changed to a foul fiend through misery.

In the mean time, L'Estrange, in his enforced retirement, had not forgotten to supply himself with a means of knowing everything that went on in the house. In most places he had an agent of some kind; where he had not his intimate knowledge of human nature made it not difficult for him to find out the creature he needed.

He had heard of the Austrian lady's flight. This small episode, which in days gone by would scarcely have caused him a moment's thought, had wrought upon his mind to such an extent that a serious relapse had been the consequence.

It was pretty much as the landlord had conjectured. The proud lady who had put down her pride so woefully, trampling her own and her husband's honor in the dust, was one of the many to whom this man had vowed undying attachment. She had tired him, and he had abandoned her; and from the day of their parting years before in sunny Italy to this time, when L'Estrange and she found themselves strangely under the same roof, they had never met. The fair Austrian had been forgotten, relegated in his mind to the record of past absurdities, but she had never forgotten him.

Her life had been uneventful, lived out in a small German town, where petty gossip is the sole excitement. She had married a man for whom she cared little, simply because to marry had been rendered almost necessary by the exigencies of her position. She had had no children. What wonder, then, that her mind dwelt, ever more morbidly as the slow years passed by, on this one warm, passionate episode in her otherwise cold career?

In any case, so it was. She believed that the man who had loved her then—the man whose tender speeches rung ever in her ears—loved her still with the same passion, and that only necessity, biting poverty or unacknowledged ties, had forced him to leave her so cruelly. After all, it was only a very commonplace and every-day matter. To the woman this summer-day's love-making had been that one great epoch from which everything past and future should thenceforward be dated—the era of an awakening into life of feelings that had before lain dormant and unsuspected in her being. To the man it was nothing more than one sweet out of many—a sweet which, when it should cloy upon his fastidious taste, could be put away without a sigh to the memory of its sweetness.

With the idea in her mind of his continued faithfulness, the Austrian lady had persuaded her husband to travel, only that she might search for her lost lover through the length and breadth of Europe. But for the greater part of two years they had been wanderers, and still they had come upon no traces of him who had formerly seemed to be ubiquitous. She had begun to mourn for him as the dead, when suddenly, in this out-of-the-way corner, at this strange season, she saw his face once more.

It was seldom that this proud lady betrayed the emotions of her soul. It may be that her inner consciousness of want of rectitude of purpose had been one great agent in the formation of those barriers of steel with which she sought to surround herself. But this time there was no help for her. The pent-up torrent had grown in force and intensity, until no bounds could restrain its impetuous overflow. She was a woman, and the haggardness of the face of the man she loved, the stooping walk, the whitened hair, spoke so powerfully to her imagination that she could scarcely be calm. Was it for her he had been sorrowing? And yet in that flash of recognition at the dinner-table she had read nothing but cold indifference. She knew him to be a consummate actor: was this, then, put on? In her hungry desire to know the whole truth she prepared an interview for that evening; but before it her measures had been taken. There was a person in the house—one she had met before—who, her woman's instinct told her, would willingly lay down his life in her service. She would take him into her counsels; and if the presentiment which lay cold at her heart as she looked upon the well-known face that evening should turn out to be true—if she could never be consoled with this man's love—she would flee from the place, leave her husband, give up her position in society and hide her humiliation in a convent.

And so it had all happened. What could L'Estrange say when she spoke to him passionately of their former love, when she asked him plainly if there remained any vestige of it in his heart?

He thought to do what was best and wisest; he thought to kill the madness in her soul by letting her see at once that all which had passed between them was as though it had never been. For Laura's unconscious influence and those struggles through which he had passed had not been altogether in vain; L'Estrange was a better man than he had been in almost any period of his strange, wild career.

Deeply as he pitied the erring lady, he told her the truth—told her that in his heart all such feelings as she would have striven to awaken were for ever dead. It was painful to listen to her wild reproaches, to hear that it was he who had made her life a desolation—painful, with only the frail panels of a dividing door between them and the pure child, to bow his head beneath the torrent of her well-deserved anger. But it did not last long. In his dark eyes, made brilliant by fever, in the stern lines written by trouble on his strong face, in the determined tones of his voice, she read his resolve, and with the coming on of darkness she fled over the snows to a hamlet in the mountains, there to stay, under the roof of a poor herdsman, until the first hue-and-cry should be over. Those who helped her flight were faithful to her cause; their meaures were well taken, and the drifting of the snow obliterated all marks of footsteps. In time she reached the distant convent, and the mystery of her disappearance was never solved.

But into L'Estrange's soul the iron entered. At the threshold of a new life past evil—evil irrevocable—was meeting him, and before the irrevocable the spirit of the strong man sank. That night he would not touch the beguiling potion. He almost hailed the bitter physical and mental pain which this abstaining entailed. It seemed like a kind of expiation for the follies of his life. He could not close his eyes. Throughout the long watches of the night he paced his room, body and soul racked with inconceivable anguish. The pain was beginning to tell on his strong frame.

When, early on the following morning, the little Laura went into her friend's room, she found him stretched on the sofa pale and gaunt, like one who has passed through a death-agony. She noticed the change at once, and ran to his side: "Mon père is worse?"

"Yes, Laura," he replied; then he took her small face in his hands, and holding it there for a few moments gazed on it earnestly: "Petite chèrie, we must lose no time."

"In finding papa?" replied the little one seriously. "Mon père, I think it will be soon. Last night I dreamt I saw him. Is he here, in this house, I wonder?"

But her friend turned away: "Little one, you are too much shut up here, and this makes you imaginative. It is a fine day. We must ask the good girl who waits on you to take you for a run on the crisp snow."

The little girl clapped her hands. "Yes," she said, "it will be nice, but mon père must have breakfast first."

She rang the bell and proceeded to arrange everything, to have the stove lighted, to set out the breakfast-things in their little sitting-room, and to superintend the preparation of chocolate *à la Française*, for Laura had become quite a little woman in her ways: then, as she saw that her friend was still suffering, she sat by his side and sang to him in her sweet, childish way till his eyes closed. The little child-heart, by the outcome of its tenderness, had brought rest to the weary brain, the pain-racked soul.

It was nearly midday when, all radiant with color and life, Laura returned from her ramble with the good-natured chambermaid. As she entered the room one of the waiters left it. She found L'Estrange dressed, and sitting in an easy-chair close by the stove, which showed a little patch of glowing red.

He called her to his side, and lifting her on to his knees took off her warm cloak and hood with all the tenderness of a woman, then stroking back her fair hair he kissed her on the brow. "Laura, petite chèrie," he said in a low tone, as if speaking to himself rather than addressing her, "the time has nearly come."

She put her arms round his neck, and resting her fair head on his shoulder looked up into his strong, pale face. "What time, mon père?" she asked in an awed whisper.

"When thou and I must part, fillette."

But the child lifted her head and shook her golden curls. The clear, bracing air, the brilliant sunshine, the glittering snow had breathed a spirit of gladness into her heart. She could not see the necessity for such sad forebodings.

"Mon père," she answered eagerly, "you should not say things like that; indeed, indeed, it's very wrong. You are going back with me to mamma, who'll be ever so glad to see us; and my own papa is to be found: he will thank you, mon père, for bringing me, and then we shall all be *so* happy together."

For this was always the end of the child's plans. She could not imagine anything else. Her friend smiled, and then he sighed. "Soit donc, petite sage," he replied enigmatically, and Laura was perfectly satisfied.

Once or twice during that day the mysterious waiter interviewed L'Estrange, and each time Laura was condemned to be mystified. They spoke in a language which was a jargon to her; but she was accustomed to mystery where this strange friend of hers was concerned.

The waiter was keeping him *au courant* in the most trivial details that concerned those inhabitants of the house in whom L'Estrange was interested. He heard of the hue-and-cry that followed the Austrian lady, and of her husband's despair; he heard of the several arrivals, first Maurice Grey's, and then Arthur Forrest's; he knew that they had dined together tête-à-tête and sat a long time over their wine, evidently in deep converse; finally, when the two men were closeted in Maurice's room, his confidential emissary was hovering about, ready to report the slightest extraordinary demonstration. For L'Estrange did not credit Arthur Forrest with so much diplomacy as he had hitherto used in his treatment of the delicate mission with which Margaret had entrusted him, and he knew that fire lay hidden under Maurice Grey's cold reserve. The name of his wife blundered out by a stranger, who would appear to know the sad details of her history and his own, might very possibly cause an explosion of some kind; indeed, during that long evening, whose tedious hours not even Laura's gentle ministries could beguile, the Frenchman was on the alert. From moment to moment he expected to hear the door of the neighboring room pushed violently open, and to understand from his well-feed observer that the young peace-maker had been thrust out from the presence of the proud Englishman, who would feel himself doubly injured by this interference.

Laura did not tell her friend about the strange look which had met hers that evening, though the child pondered it in her simple heart, trying to find out what there was in it that had affected and fascinated her. She would have asked L'Estrange if he thought that this man who had looked at her with a kind of yearning in his sad face could be, indeed, the father they were seeking; but one of his dark moods was on him, and for the first time in all their intercourse she feared to break it.

Since their dinner in the afternoon he had not stirred from the one position, except when the mysterious informant had come in to report progress, and then he had looked at him from under his shaggy eyebrows with a glance that would have killed deceit at its very birth. At other times he remained silent, his hands clasped over an ancient staff, on his strong face a look of pain—but pain crushed down by indomitable will—his lips and nostrils faintly quivering as any sound came from outside, his eyes fixed on the small patch of glowing red that was waning and fading out as the day passed away behind the western mountains.

But though Laura feared to break in upon his silence, she did not fear him. She sat at his feet, curled up like a kitten wearied with play, on a crimson cushion that belonged to the heavy-looking couch, trying by the shimmering firelight to look over a book of very gaudy pictures which the landlady, who pitied her apparent isolation, had lent her.

Evening deepened into the early night of the season. Candles were brought by Laura's friend, the good-natured Swiss chambermaid, and before the little girl had succeeded in tracing a history for half of the wonderful pictures in her book, she grew so sleepy that her friend was moved from his abstraction to ring the bell and give her into the care of Gretchen, after a most loving good-night and many tender recommendations to the waiting-maid to take every care of his little treasure.

He did not leave his place by the fireside till his delicate ear told him that there was nothing stirring in the house but himself.

CHAPTER X.

PEACE, BE STILL

But what time through the heart and through the brain
God hath transfixed us, we, so moved before,
Attain to a calm. Ay, shouldering weights of pain,
We anchor in deep waters, safe from shore,
And hear, submissive, o'er the stormy main
God's chartered judgments walk for evermore.

WAS he to pass another night of racking pain, another night of restless wandering? The little chest which held the only means by which this question, to him so awful, could be answered in the negative, lay at his feet; his very soul was yearning for rest. Outside, the white mountains were sleeping, pure as angels undefiled, beneath the moonbeams; from the next room, the door of which he had opened, came the light sound of the child's regular breathing; in the house was silence absolute.

And *his* rest might be as absolute as any—nay, not only so, it might be filled with sensuous pleasure, such pleasure as his brilliant youth, that had gone by for ever, had often afforded him; it might be clothed with images of beauty and delight. But, on the other hand, had he not chosen suffering—suffering instead of delight—to be a soul-purifier, to atone, if atonement might be, for some of the self-seeking of his ruined life?

And he could delay no longer; an act of expiation was to be wrought which would demand all the force of his soul to carry to a successful issue; the father of the child he loved was at hand; with all the strong energies of his soul awake he must meet him, and make him own that his enemy's words were the words of truth.

Then—L'Estrange acknowledged it to himself with a sigh—the suffering whose ravages he dreaded did not overcloud his intellect, did not bewilder his brain, as its antidote had done; rather, like the purging fire, it seemed to draw out and develop the greatness of the soul that was in him.

The strong man shivered as he turned from his only hope, and began once again in the unhealthy activity of his heart and brain to think and reason, to live an inner life that was gradually, by its overpowering force, drawing away the life from his body.

He bowed his face in his hands. Where was all this to end? he asked himself. Was he to go down to the grave with the burden of his own ruined life and of the lives he had ruined hanging like a millstone about his neck, dragging him down to the nether hell, without a hope save in the last vague dream of the infidel—an utter death, an eternal sleep?—and this, in his very darkest moments, L'Estrange had never brought himself to believe.

So intense was his mental life during the first part of that night that his physical sufferings were almost forgotten, but at last, as the slow hours went by, pain came, twinge after twinge, that would not be denied, and panting and exhausted, his great strength failing in the struggle, the man threw himself down upon his bed, moaning faintly.

A wild impatience followed. The spasms he experienced were of that gnawing, craving kind more difficult, perhaps, than any other to be borne.

Not the sharp stinging which rends the frame, and then, spent by very force, allows it to rest; but the dull, ceaseless throbbing that nothing can stay, that gives no moment of respite to the overwrought nerves. L'Estrange at the moment felt as if it would madden him. His blood was coursing like liquid fire through his veins; his hands and feet were burning; drops of agony stood on his brow. He crossed his room suddenly, and throwing open the window leaned out into the night; but first—for through everything this strange man did ran the tender thoughtfulness that could only have been prompted by a fine soul—he shut noiselessly the door of communication between his room and Laura's lest the chill night-air should touch his darling. He looked out upon a strange scene—the white earth, in shadow save where the moon had touched it with an unearthly radiance; the mountains looking verily like giants in the uncertain light, yet glistening and transparent where the night-born light was resting; cloud-shadows, whose depth seemed infinite as the outer darkness of despair, blotting out here and there the transparent whiteness; behind one of the distant peaks a pale line, faint and tremulous, that told of coming dawn; over all a weird unreality.

The face that looked out into the dim night was as strange as the scene could be, though it lacked the utter stillness of the shrouded, moonlit earth. The eyes were wild and wandering, with an impatient, hungry look in them, as though they were searching, seeking, striving to draw from the visible the secrets of that which no eye beholds; the mouth quivered with the storms of feeling; the brow was contracted by a mortal agony, and from time to time the pale lips moved as if in pitiful appeal to some hidden power. But after a few moments of earnest gazing some of all this passed by. It would almost have seemed as though the influence of Nature's eternal calm had been breathed in upon his soul through the medium of sense, or rather perhaps it was a thought from within that swept over the tumult of the man's brain, so that suddenly his agony was stayed.

Was it so very strange? Long ago, in the far ages, a Man to whom conflict and storm were known in all their fulness stood up on a dark night and said to the angry billows and raging winds, "Peace, be still." Was it altogether for the sake of that terror-stricken crew, or was it not also a sublime parable? For, evermore, it is the same. The Man, present in the midst of the soul's tumult, bids in His own time—the best time for the stricken—that the storms which overwhelm it shall sink to rest.

Thus it was with L'Estrange. In the silence and solitude he was finding the great Father, who, though we know it not, is never very far from any one of us. "God is here" was the thought that swept over him through the stillness of Nature, through the profound silence of the night. He knelt before the window and stretched out his hands to the midnight heavens. Who shall say what dreams, what possibilities, passed in that moment through his soul? For with his errors and imperfections, his falseness and his folly, this man was one of the mighty few, a son of divine genius. Will they be judged by another code, I sometimes wonder, than the common herd to whom their gigantic struggles, their vast temptations, their agonies, their failures, must for ever be a life unknown, a sealed-up book?—such a man as Shelley, peering in his spirit's misery through the ages, then when nothing but the aching void, the yawning nothing, answered his wild search, giving himself up to the proclamation of a dark infidelity; or Byron, dying for a dream; or Keats, breathing out his young life with the cry of a disappointed soul? Will the misguided, distorted greatness find in the Hereafter a better sphere? Have they, these mighty dead, even with the last breath of a life tortured with earth's blackness, received as by inspiration the fair beauty of undying truth into their souls? Who shall say? In the presence of mysteries like these we can only bow our heads and pray that so it may be.

To L'Estrange a moment of such inspiration had come. He had prayed before. Often during these last days, when gradually the fetters of self-love had been falling off from his soul, he had cried out in the darkness to the Father of spirits. But *then* He had been a grand abstraction; *now*, for the first time, He was near and real.

First happiness, then vengeance, then atoning suffering and self-abnegation, had been looked for as the life of his spirit's life. In that hour of awful sweetness they all fell off from him. God looked down into the man's heart; God was what, all unconsciously to itself, that heart had been seeking, and there was a great calm.

Sweetly the daughter of his affections had sung to him that evening about the Crucified; to the man of the world her hymn had been an idle tale; now all was changed. In the great stillness of God's calm upon his heart he was able to listen more truly.

Bowing his head, the stricken man wept as the Gospel-story in its simple beauty surged in upon his heart. He had often reasoned about it. Calmly and coolly he had torn to shreds the arguments which men weaker but better than himself had brought to bear upon its truth. In this transcendent moment reasoning was not—it could not be.

True, in the craving need of his own heart, in the sudden, awful revelation of his spirit's darkness, *there* he read its truth, and like a little child he wept before its unspeakable beauty and pathos.

L'Estrange could never have told how long the time was that he passed on his knees before the open window looking out upon the snow. It was like a dream, but when he rose the white dawn was beginning to rise over the mountains.

The spasms had left him; he scarcely dreaded them now, for the mental struggles that had rent his very being had merged into a great calm. But as he shut the window and tried to cross the room his knees trembled and he staggered strangely.

Weakness as of a little child seemed to have come upon him, and weariness too—a blessed weariness. He threw himself down upon the bed, and for the time forgot all his woes in sleep.

CHAPTER XI

HAUNTING MEMORIES.

I am digging my warm heart
Till I find its coldest part;
I am digging wide and low,
Further than a spade can go,
Till that, when the pit is deep
And large enough, I there may heap
All my present pain and past.

It was late on the following morning when L'Estrange awoke. He felt strangely refreshed, and wondered for the first few moments what was this change which had come upon him. Then the remembrance of that night's conflict and conquest returned. The calm was still in his heart, drowning in its depths all earthly yearnings.

But more urgently than before he felt the necessity for action. He rang the bell, and his special attendant answered it. From him he learnt that the child, fearful of disturbing him, had taken her morning run with Gretchen while he slept, and that the two Englishmen had started from the hotel with alpenstocks and knapsacks, stating that they would probably not return that evening. From scraps of their conversation the man had gathered that the elder of the two was desirous of showing the younger his home among the mountains. It was therefore more than probable that the chalet usually inhabited by Mr. Grey was their destination.

Mr. Grey's servant, somewhat to his own displeasure, had been left behind at the hotel.

To all this intelligence L'Estrange listened silently. He was surprised, for he had not imagined Maurice Grey would have taken so kindly to the young man who was interesting himself in his affairs; he was disappointed, for on this very day he had determined to meet Maurice, and now another necessary delay must intervene. But he did not express any of his feelings to his attendant. He was accustomed to make use of men, but to all whom he made thus useful himself, his motives and his emotions were a sealed book.

He rose, dressed with the help of the complaisant waiter, and went into the hotel-garden to wait for the return of his darling, and to try, by diligent exercise and exposure to the keen bracing air, to regain some of his old strength.

In the mean time, Maurice Grey and Arthur Forrest were finding their way over the mountains to the chalet, which Arthur was curious to see.

They were drawn together by a kind of mutual attraction that neither of them could explain to himself. Arthur was occasionally very indignant with Maurice's cynicism; he was almost afraid of his superior knowledge of the world; he shrank painfully from his ready sneer, and while he was with him lived in a constant state of agitation in his fear of letting out anything before the time, and thus widening the breach between husband and wife; yet he liked Maurice Grey, he admired his fine proportions, endowed him with all kinds of knowledge and wisdom, and was impatient of the hours that divided them. Maurice, on the other hand, was inclined to despise this boy's rawness and simplicity, and to despise himself for in any sense making a confidant of him, and yet he liked him; he enjoyed his society; the bright expressive eyes of the young man had the power of drawing him out, of making him talk about himself and the troubles of his life.

Perhaps the secret of this strange attraction on his side might have been found in the young Arthur's sympathy and frank admiration, for few men are above the pardonable weakness of liking to be admired and sought out.

The paths that led to Maurice's dwelling-place were tolerably steep, and in some places the snow was soft, in others the frost made the paths slippery; therefore during their walk Maurice and Arthur were too much engrossed with the one necessity of keeping their footing to find much breath for conversation. But they were both good walkers and strong, stalwart men; therefore, although they had started comparatively late in the morning, the sun had not dropped behind the mountains that shut in the valley before they were seated in Maurice's little room, a jug of whisky punch between them, and on the table the white bread and the meat with which Maurice had taken care to provide himself before leaving the hotel that morning.

They found everything in first-rate order. On the previous day Marie and her little grandchild had arrived. The stove had been kept alight all night, according to Karl's strict orders, lest the books and manuscripts should suffer from the damp, and the old woman had just finished a general cleaning up when her master and his visitor arrived.

The dinner was certainly plain, but the two Englishmen did justice to it—Arthur perhaps appreciating it all the more for the absence of any suspicious-looking *entrées.*

"What do you think?" said Maurice when they both paused at last from sheer exhaustion. "This is a very rough place; can you manage to put up with it for a night or two? If so, I will undertake to show you some of the finest points of view in the Alps, seeing which at this season, you know, will render you for all the future a respectable traveller."

Arthur laughed: "Put up with it! I should just think so. I never saw anything so delightfully primitive. I quite envy you your little snuggery."

A sad smile played round Maurice's lips, it softened his face marvellously: "I am scarcely a person to envy, and yet this had been my dream for many a long day. I thought it would make me happy."

There was a bitter ring, a kind of irony of self, in the last words. He looked out meditatively over the snow. "Men are strangely constituted," he continued sadly; "the dream and hope of to-day are the weariness and disgust of to-morrow." He turned to his young companion: "People will always insist upon buying their own experience at any cost, or else I should prove to you, as a lesson that I have painfully gained, how foolish it is to set one's heart too much on anything under the sun. 'Light come, light go;' if we hold to our possessions lightly, the loss of them grieves us little I see in your eyes that my philosophy is repugnant."

For Arthur read all Maurice's cynicism in the light of his history. His face flushed. "Depth of feeling is never wasted," he said earnestly; "I ought to know that."

Maurice had cleared away the remnants of their simple meal. They were sitting, one on each side of the small stove, discussing some famous cigars, a stock of which Arthur always had on hand.

His remark made Maurice turn round to him suddenly: "That's rather a deep doctrine for one of your age; but it reminds me you were to tell me something to prove that Solomon, who professed, by the bye, to understand human nature, was altogether wrong in that impolite statement of his about women. Stop, let me see! I drank rather too much last night; still, I don't think I am wrong."

But Arthur turned away. His heart and courage had fallen suddenly. It had been easy enough to think and plan, to imagine how with heart-eloquence he would describe the woman he loved—how he could tell of her quiet, self-denying life, of her constancy, of her undying memory of the past—how, when his story had been triumphantly told, he would give her name, and so dispel for ever the mist of falsehood which had risen in dark clouds about her husband's idea of her. The moment for all this had come, and he found that the heart-thrilling words would not answer to his summons, that his feelings were too intense, that the fear of failure paralyzed him.

"Not now, not here," he said to himself, and then he rose and looked out of the window.

The sun was setting over the mountains, and on their summits a dark cloud was resting, but above it and beyond in a vast circle of rays the golden glory shone. It irradiated the pure snows till they blushed into beauty, it lit up the heavens, it glistened from the torrents. The whole landscape was transfigured—changed from the still fixity of the snow-bound North into the voluptuous warmth of an Oriental dream; the dark fir trees showed crimson stems; the reaches of billowy snow looked warm and inviting under the golden radiance; the distant peaks glowed and shone till to the excited fancy of the gazer they might have seemed hewn out of fire. Arthur looked, and the narrow roof seemed to press him down, the four walls of his friend's chalet were a prison.

"I cannot tell it here," he said to himself; "out there under the witness of the sky, in the presence of the pure snow-peaks, it may perhaps be easier."

Maurice was looking at him curiously. "I fear I have been showing impertinent curiosity," he said lightly, "but you drew it on yourself. Why did you interest me so strangely?"

"I spoke impulsively," replied Arthur in the same light manner, "and, I think, rather underrated the difficulties of what I was attempting. For this once you must excuse me. I have a certain disinclination, for which I really am at a loss to account, to telling my story (a very simple one, after all) in this place. If you can preserve your interest till to-morrow, I will promise not to disappoint you. Take me to the point you mentioned just now, and there I will tell you as well as I can."

As he spoke the last words the young man's voice deepened, and there was a certain solemnity in his manner which aroused Maurice's curiosity; but he said nothing more on the subject, and the two men smoked on in silence till the golden glory had passed from the earth, and the snow lay pale once more under the gray mystery of a northern night. Then Maurice looked at his young companion across the interval of shadow, and saw, by the light which gleamed fitfully from the open stove, that there was a deep thoughtfulness on his brow.

Perhaps it was this that drew him on to speak as he did. "You have only begun life," he said, "I have lived out mine, at least all the good that is in it, and yet, I scarcely know how it is, I have been drawn on to speak to you as I seldom speak to either men or women. I don't say I have no friends. I have made many, and good ones too, in the course of my wanderings, and I have appreciated their friendship, but to the best of them all my life has been a sealed-up book." He paused a little, puffing away silently, and Arthur did not speak, only the earnestness on his face deepened as he literally trembled with hope.

For Arthur's heart was as true as steel. He had thrown himself with a self-denying ardor that nothing could curb into Margaret's cause. She was still the queen of his heart, but since those first days, when her regal beauty and apparent friendlessness had driven him nearly mad with longing and desire, his queen had risen to a far loftier place in his thoughts and dreams. There was something very beautiful and rare in this unselfish devotion. Margaret *for himself*, even if he had found that her husband was dead, Arthur never imagined for a moment; in so far he had gained full victory over his own heart. Margaret happy, Margaret raised to her true position, restored to her undoubted rights, and by *his* instrumentality,—this was the proud desire of his soul. Therefore it was that he hung upon Maurice's words that evening, rejoicing with trembling that so far he had been successful.

Young and inexperienced as he was, he saw the world-weary man trusted him. This was something gained, a step in the right direction.

Arthur scanned his companion's face curiously during the silence that followed his last words. It was a mobile face, though for years it had been trained to express nothing but cynic indifference to life and its concerns. On this special evening Maurice had given way, and emotions for which few of his friends would have given him credit were writing their impress on his brow.

He got up suddenly, and crossing to the window shut out the pale snow. "It is desolate," he said in a low tone; "it makes one shiver." Then he lighted a small reading-lamp, that cast a warm yellow light over the room, and sat down again. "I saw a picture once," he continued in the same low voice, "and the snow out there makes me think of it. It was an English scene, a bit out of a village, the church lit up from inside, a house near it, the pleasant firelight shining from within crimson curtains; outside, snow and desolation. There was a solitary figure amongst it all—a woman with thin tattered clothes and haggard face in which could be seen the remnants of beauty. She was shivering alone in the cold and darkness, looking piteously in at the light. Some moral was tacked on to it, for, if I remember rightly, I came across this long ago in a book or magazine. The whole runs strangely in my mind to-night."

"And what was the moral?" asked Arthur.

"An unloved life or some such sentimental rubbish."

He tried to laugh off the impression, but Arthur, who was deeply interested, said nothing to change the subject, and almost in spite of himself, as it were, Maurice returned to it. "Strange how this haunts me!" he muttered. "'An unloved life!'—poets' trash. Women can always console themselves, and the misery of the fair is given rather to reclining on velvet and down than shivering out in the snow."

He laughed aloud, and raising his glass drained it at a draught; but there came a sudden change over his face, his brows knit, his hands worked convulsively. "If I had been mistaken—" he murmured, and his head sank upon his breast. Then, as the futility of his vague thoughts flashed over him, he raised it again. "There is no peace but in forgetfulness," he cried, and pouring out a glass of raw spirit he tossed it down his throat.

There followed a few moments of silence which Arthur feared to break, then Maurice looked across at him with a sad smile. "Young man," he said, "it is a good thing to be happy. Misery and remorse change a man woefully. Ah, it is wonderful," he continued, and there was a plaintive ring in his voice—"wonderful to think how entirely they can change us—how we become morose, dark, fretful—how we look for the old landmarks and find them gone, vanished like a dream—how we become absolutely others than ourselves!"

Arthur's voice was husky as he questioned: "Remorse! what have you to do with that?"

"I once thought nothing. Great God!"—he lifted his gleaming eyes; in the agony of the moment he seemed to have forgotten his companion—"we cannot all have patience like to Thine; and I *thought* I acted for the best. I took away my obnoxious presence, I left her to her chosen pleasures, I fled from my own disgrace."

His head sank. Emotion, fatigue, strong drink had combined to unnerve him utterly. "The face in the picture is hers," he continued in a low, broken voice; "last night I saw her so—pale, wasted by misery, an outcast—and I opened my arms to take her to a shelter, but she fled from me with horror."

Arthur was listening with an interest so deep and earnest that for a moment he forgot his self-imposed caution. He started forward impulsively, and gazing into the bloodshot eyes of the man who faced him, "It was a lying dream," he cried. "She—

But he broke off suddenly, for Maurice looked at him in a strange, questioning manner. He could have bitten off his tongue for its betrayal. "I mean—I mean—" he explained falteringly, "it was a strange dream."

His explanation could not mend matters; the mischief was done. Maurice was sufficiently himself to be able to detect a certain reality in those first hasty words. He looked at Arthur with suspicion. Could it be possible that the young man knew something of his history? The bare idea made him hastily resume his cloak of proud reserve.

He drew himself up, composed his face, and threw out his hands with a yawn: "I really should crave your indulgence. Something has come over me to-night. I feel as if I had been talking a considerable amount of nonsense." He shook his fist at the whisky-bottle. "There's the traitor. Then," bending his head courteously, "it is long since I have enjoyed anything so pleasant as an evening gossip with a friend. Really, the worst of this kind of life is the difficulty of passing one's evening. Come! a recipe for killing the time: what do you advise?"

"I know no means but endurance," replied Arthur, trying to speak lightly, though his heart was full, for the earnestness had left Maurice's face, the smile of the cynic was playing round his lips.

Indignant and disappointed, Arthur turned away, in case his less manageable features should betray him. The sphere of his experience was narrow, and therefore it was that in this relapse to his indifferent mood he failed to sympathize with Maurice.

It is only when the world has given thrust upon thrust to the heart, it is only when the dreary cry, "Vanity of vanities!" has written itself in all its desolation on the spirit, that these rapid changes from grave to gay, from deep earnestness to bitter cynicism, can be understood; for they are the product of the world's harsh lessons, the carrying out into practice of a creed taught by repeated disappointments. They speak of the soul's fear of revealing itself. Its best and its highest it would cover over with the frostwork of frivolity and cynicism, lest the pearls of its spiritual being should be trampled under the feet of swine.

Too often, unhappily, the result is that the pearls are buried irrecoverably and for ever, that the soul gains the indifference it assumes—an undying heritage of bitterness.

Ah! it is sad, infinitely sad, to think of a soul torn, ruined, in its struggles with wayward fate—too sad, if there were no beyond. But if man be weak, God is merciful. It may be that for the disappointed there is a haven, after all, in the great Hereafter to which all humanity is hastening.

CHAPTER XII.

TOLD AMONG THE SNOWS.

Oh, she was fair: her nature once all spring
And deadly beauty, like a maiden sword—
Startlingly beautiful. I see her now!

THAT was the end of anything like confidential intercourse between Maurice Grey and the young Arthur, so far as the evening passed in the chalet was concerned. They were both tired, and Maurice had once more allowed himself to take rather more strong drink than was good for him.

It was a new fault. Hitherto, in all his dark moods, through his dreary solitude, and, to him, almost as dreary times of gayety, he had always respected himself so far as to refrain from drowning his sorrows in so contemptible a way. Now, it seemed as though a crisis in his fate had come, as though he were destined to be swept away utterly in the numbing torrent of misery and loneliness.

Arthur had to assist him to bed that evening, for he was almost incapable of doing anything for himself. The young man recovered very soon from the indignant displeasure into which Maurice's cynicism had thrown him. He saw the weary man, overcome as much perhaps by emotion and fatigue as by what he had taken, sink into a deep sleep, and a dim idea of the truth dawned in upon his mind. It softened him so much that he could scarcely keep from tears as he looked on the face of his new friend, so fine in all its outlines, yet so evidently wasted by care. And this was the long-sought, the earnestly-desired—Margaret's husband, the arbiter of her destinies, the object of her changeless love.

Arthur felt a new love stirring in his heart; he treated his companion with a tender reverence.

He had some difficulty and met a few harsh words before he could rouse Maurice so far as to half lead, half drag him, into his small bed-room. When at last his efforts had been successful, when he saw him resting in the death-like immobility of sleep upon the pillow, he half trembled about the effect upon Maurice's morning mood of this little night-episode. Would he be humiliated at the remembrance of the weakness into which he had been betrayed, and shut up his heart still more from his companion?

Arthur might have spared himself the trouble of forming any conjecture on the subject. Maurice the next morning remembered very little of his strange revelations, and nothing whatever of the torpor that succeeded.

"I must have been tolerably done up last night," he said lightly when they met at the breakfast-table. "I don't really know how I got to bed. I think I must have undressed in my sleep."

"You seemed half asleep," said Arthur cautiously. "When we separated I was pretty far gone myself. I dare say this strong air has something to do with it."

"It has the effect of champagne upon one's spirits—at least, so they say. I feel anything but lively this morning.

However, if you are still in the same mind, we had better try what high latitudes can do for us. Do you feel up to a good climb?"

"Thoroughly—in the very mood for exertion."

"Well, then, old fellow! set to work with a will, for if we intend to sup on anything more inviting than black bread and sausages, we must get back to the hotel this evening. That rascal Karl only half supplied us with bread and meat."

"I could sup on anything after a walk like yesterday's to give me an appetite. However, Master Karl evidently intended that we should return to-day. What a joke he is! If eyes could kill, I should certainly have been slain yesterday when I suggested that we could dispense with attendance."

Maurice smiled: "Poor old Karl! Well, I believe he is one of the few a man can trust. It is my chief reason for keeping him, for really, in some ways, he's an immense bore. That big fellow is as frightened of bogies as a baby. The dark weather we had sent him nearly out of his wits. It was chiefly in consideration for his feelings that I put up at the hotel the other day."

"Then I ought, certainly, to be very thankful to him," said Arthur warmly; "he will think I have made him a poor return. I suppose we may leave our knapsacks under the care of your old woman here?" he continued. "It's all very well to talk of their convenience and that kind of thing; I can only say that my shoulders ached considerably yesterday; they've not recovered yet."

Maurice laughed: "You are a young traveller, my dear fellow; however, I'll be merciful. Leave them here, by all means, and start this time untrammelled. But come! Are you ready? Now, if you take my advice—and I know something of the mountains—you should begin quietly. We can quicken the pace when we get into the swing and get up the wind—two very serious matters, I can assure you."

There had been sufficient thaw to make the roads practicable, at least to men with strong boots and leathern gaiters. Many of the steeper paths were nothing better than watercourses. But this was a matter of minor import to the two men. It took Arthur some time, as his friend had predicted, to get into the swing, and they plodded on for some miles in silence, Arthur turning over and over in his head that tale, so oft told in the silence of his heart, of his first love, which had come upon him like a kind of magic, awakening him to a truer comprehension of life, a fuller appreciation of beauty—the tale which he must tell, before many minutes should pass over, to another—to a man unsympathetic perhaps, and hard. Once or twice he ventured to steal a glance at Maurice. His face was inscrutable. For the moment he was really nothing more than the quiet English gentleman, patient and enduring, as becomes one of his race—manly in his way of meeting difficulties, determined when it is necessary to overcome them. In walking, more especially in climbing, there is abundant room for the display of character, and in Switzerland a young Englishman of breeding and degree may be known at once by his bearing.

Their route was very lonely. It would have shocked an American traveller, who does not care to pass over any but well-frequented roads, where pedestrians, *chaises-à-porteur* and heavily-laden mules are to be met with in numbers. But with the early break-up of the season these things had gone. Even the small sheds where light refreshments are temptingly displayed in the summer months were empty and deserted; the places of the men who for the small sum of fifty centimes had been wont to awaken the echoes of the everlasting hills, "knew them no more." Maurice and Arthur had the mountains to themselves. They reached about midday the point of which Maurice had spoken. He had not overpraised it. After a last little bit of climbing, so steep that it had taken all their attention to keep a footing on the slippery rock, they reached a kind of rocky plateau partly covered with snow, partly patched with the emerald green which belongs peculiarly to the Alps. Standing near a ragged pine tree, they looked up. The sky was of a deep unruffled blue, and against it, clear as crystal, shone out the dazzle of the snow-peaks; lower down, a glacier, rendered pure by the late snow-falls, swept a radiant ice-river between gray, cloud-like rocks, in whose crevices the rich soft moss had made a home; lower still, tier above tier, rose the straight stems and green crowns of the hardy pine; while far below, at an almost inconceivable depth, that which could not be seen made itself felt—a torrent had been making for its waters a way throughout the ages, and its roar and hiss rose evermore into the daylight.

Arthur gazed silently for a few minutes, then turned to his friend a pale and earnest face. "Beautiful!" he said in a low, impassioned voice. He bent his young head. "It make me think of *her*."

Maurice smiled. He was pleased with the frank expression of enjoyment, and in his answer there was an elder man's indulgence to the amiable weakness of a younger: "Come! here's a forsaken shed looks as if it had been left on purpose —faces the sunshine and sheltered from the wind. We can sit down and rest if you like, take our brandy and water, and eat the crusts we were provident enough to bring, for, by Jove! in these regions, at least, a man can't live on air; then you must tell me about this mysterious '*her*,' in whom I really begin to take an alarming interest. Why, old fellow, what's come over you? Here, take some brandy. You've been doing too much. One oughtn't to overdo this kind of thing at first."

But Arthur put away the brandy-flask with an attempt at a smile. Not fatigue, but a sudden emotion had overcome him. Margaret's fate seemed in his hands. It was trembling in the balance, and he felt, for the moment, powerless by excess of feeling.

"I will drink nothing, thank you," he said; and he sat down on a stone bench in full view of the radiant snow-peaks. They were sheltered from the bleak wind by one of the walls; the opening of the shed let in a flood of sunlight. It might have been a summer's day.

Maurice spread his overcoat on the ground and stretched himself out luxuriously, with his face toward Arthur. "After labor, rest," he said lightly; "but come, I am impatient; let the mystic lady appear."

He laughed as he spoke, but there was no answering merriment in Arthur's face. He looked away from Maurice toward the mountains. "I wish to God she might!" he said earnestly. "If her sweet face were here my poor words would be useless. It would tell its own tale of long-suffering, of angelic patience, of truth, of purity. But—" he felt, though he did not dare to look round, that the face of his companion expressed calm philosophic wonder, that his lips were curled into the faintest possible sneer—"I did not intend to rhapsodize. My tale should speak for itself plain, unvarnished facts, which I defy the falsest being that ever lived to gainsay."

He paused, and Maurice sighed. "The young man is evidently cracked on this point," was the burden of his thought. "I am in for a good half hour of ecstasies. Well, I brought it on myself. Patience is the only remedy.—Permit me," he said aloud; "this promises to be rather exciting —I must hear it through the medium of my usual sedative."

He lit a cigar, and the blue wreaths of smoke curled up into the sunshine, while Arthur, his task rendered all the more difficult by his companion's nonchalance, struggled to find the truant words in which he had thought to clothe his subject. "It is not very long since I first met her," he said quietly, "but it seems a lifetime, for the meeting changed me. In the light of her history I read that life has a certain reality; in the depths of her sad eyes I saw that endurance and self-denial are beautiful and good. It must have been early in the month of May—yes, I remember, the Exhibition of the Royal Academy had not long been open—I strolled in one day to amuse myself and pass an hour or two of the afternoon. My cousin and fiancée was to have met me there. She did not appear, and I was considerably indignant, for at that time I believed that all womankind owed me a debt of gratitude, simply for being and giving them the light of my countenance. You see, women had spoiled me from my babyhood upward. But enough about myself.

"As I was wandering about, discontented and cross, a picture took my fancy. I sat down on the seat that faced it to examine it in detail. There was only one other on the same bench (for it was tolerably late and the rooms were thinning), a lady, but I paid little attention to her, as her dress was shabby and she wore a close bonnet and thick crape veil. It had been my habit to ogle only the well-dressed ladies—others offended my fastidious taste; but when this stranger fell back suddenly in a deep faint I did my duty as a gentleman (there was no one else in the room at the moment)—I rose hastily to offer her assistance.

"Then for the first time I saw her face, as the bonnet and veil had fallen back. Such a face! I wish I could describe it--its purity of outline, its exquisite marble-like coloring, its deep sadness. She had a quantity of golden hair: as I tried to raise her it fell down in a perfect shower over my arm. I was paralyzed—a sudden fever possessed me. I could have carried off the mysterious lady there and then, and hidden her away from every eye. But do what I would I could not restore her to consciousness, and I began to tremble. I had a kind of objection to calling in the assistance of any passing stranger. At the critical moment, however, like the good genius in a fairy-tale, my kind little cousin appeared, and in a very few moments took the matter out of my hands altogether. She was as enthusiastic as I had been, and far more successful. In a few moments we had the pleasure of seeing our fair lady restored, and of taking her back to her home, which turned out to be only a miserable lodging in the gloomiest part of London.

"If I had been in love with her in her fainting condition, I tell you honestly that when I saw her eyes open, when I heard her voice—above all, when I read that deep sadness in her face—I was ten times more in love than before. But such was the influence of her gentle womanly dignity I dared express nothing either by word or sign. She thanked us with all the cordiality of a lady, but utterly and absolutely denied herself to us for the future, and I could not think of disobeying. In accepting our services she was like a queen dispensing her favors. All I could hope was that kindly chance would favor me. For the next few days I could think of nothing else: her face followed me like a dream of beauty that haunts the soul. My one hope was in the picture-galleries. As you may believe, I attended them daily, and some days later I saw her again in the same place. This time she did not see me. I watched her, myself unseen. Unhappily, a false counsellor was at hand. He had traced the direction of my glance before I knew he was near. I took his odious advice; I was weak enough to believe him. In disobedience to her express commands I visited her at the address to which we had taken her."

Maurice's cigar had died down; he was listening with apparent interest. "And you received a rebuff for your pains," he said lightly.

Arthur flushed: "A rebuff! say rather a rebuke; and such a gentle, womanly one that it cut me to the very soul. I felt that, *coûte que coûte*, I must know more of her; but I could not do it in *that* way, you know. I was puzzled and baffled, doubtful how to act. Then came in the gentle self-denial, the noble trustfulness of another woman to my assistance. My cousin Adèle read my sadness, and was not long in putting her finger on the cause. She helped me; she made herself Margaret's friend—"

Arthur stopped suddenly. He had let out the name, which he had intended to bring in at the end of his tale—a grand finale.

His sudden and evidently conscious pause gave the error significance. In a moment Arthur saw what he had done. A tremor passed through Maurice's frame. He turned round sharply and fixed the young man with his stern eyes. "Why do you stop?" he said. "Go on, if your tale be worth the telling."

And Arthur continued falteringly: "We were able to give her some assistance—that is, my cousin did. In her lonely and unprotected condition she had been tortured by the persecutions of the man who, as I afterward found out, had wrought the wrong from the effects of which she had been suffering during those long years. To live out her solitary life in peace, she had hidden herself in an out-of-the-way seaside village. Her visit to London had been made for the purpose of gaining some employment, her income proving insufficient for the education of her only child, a daughter. whom she had brought up in strict seclusion."

Maurice's face was turned from Arthur, but as, almost insensibly to himself, the young man's voice grew stern and deep, he saw that his companion winced and cowered. It was almost as though he had received some unlooked-for blow.

"In London," continued Arthur, "the ruffian came upon her traces. Mrs. Grey feared and hated him—the very sight of him was odious to her. It was only to save her name—her husband's name, as I afterward learnt—from public notice that she refrained at this time from calling in the strong arm of the law.

"To baffle him and preserve her privacy she took refuge in flight; my cousin helped her, and from that day dated their warm friendship. She returned then to her own home—the little village by the seaside. Adèle knew her address. I was not taken into their confidence; I was suffered to be useful, but I knew nothing, and yet even in that usefulness I reckoned myself happy.

"After this weeks passed by of which I can scarcely give an account—weeks during which my life might have been summed up in one short sentence—I was in love. I felt it was hopeless. My cousin, who knew more of Mrs. Grey's history than I did, let me feel this whenever—and it was very often—she was the topic of conversation between us. She herself had not given me the faintest encouragement, yet I hoped against hope. I thought, I studied, I planned, I put off my idleness. My dream was to gain fame and distinction by my own efforts. It was all for her. Ah!"—once more the young man was warming to his subject—"words fail when I try to express what her influence was. I became a different man; the memory of her goodness and beauty, of her life of self-denial, changed me utterly. But at last the craving to see her face again, to know more certainly that my hope was vain, became almost too great to be borne. You see, I was young, and had not been accustomed to this kind of thing. It preyed upon my health and spirits. Besides all this, certain disagreeable and—as I must always maintain—utterly unfounded rumors with regard to Mrs. Grey were flying about."

Again Maurice winced and shrank, but this time Arthur did not pause.

He went on rapidly: "These things maddened me: if she had been an angel from heaven I could not have believed more steadfastly in her truth. I longed to make myself her champion, to gain from herself the right to protect her. Then once more my cousin helped me. She gave me the address I wanted, she sent me to find our friend, she told me to offer her my services.

"As you may imagine, it was not necessary to urge the matter. I found my way to the seaside village. I entered the little cottage where her quiet, lonely life had been lived out, and there I learned the secret of her sadness. It had wrought upon her fearfully since we parted in London When first I saw her she was sitting in her garden; I was at the window of her drawing-room. I thought that death was written on her face, it was so worn and wasted, so utterly forlorn, but beautiful still. Another trouble had come to overwhelm her: her little child, a girl, in whom all the affection of her heart was centred, had been stolen from her in some mysterious way."

In his earnestness Arthur's voice grew husky: "I forgot my own desires; all I had come to say passed away from my mind; only I threw myself heart and soul at her feet, imploring her to use me for her service, and"—the boy's voice sank—"she trusted me; she told me something of her history; she let me know that she had *one* craving, one longing desire."

He paused. Maurice had risen to a sitting position; his face was buried in his hands, his great frame was convulsed. "It was—?" he asked, fixing his eyes suddenly on his companion's face. "Speak, and at once."

Arthur rose and stood before him. "Maurice Grey," he said, "your wife is pure as an angel, white as the snow up there. Her one thought through these long years has been of you. The name she teaches her child to lisp is yours. She loves you only; her heart is single. All she asks is this—to speak to you face to face, to see you again before she dies. This is the quest that brought me here, for I have hunted for you through the length and breadth of Europe—sought you as a man seeks his enemy. It was to tell you this, to bring you a message from your wife."

He bowed his head: "God knows it has been done in singleness of heart. All I wish or seek is her restoration to happiness. I have not said half I intended. I greatly fear I am a poor pleader, but, Maurice Grey, I call upon you to listen to me. Return to England, see your wife, judge for yourself; you will find then that you have both been the victims of some terrible mistake."

He ceased, but Maurice did not answer, and once more his face was averted.

Arthur's heart sank. "It has been all in vain," he said to himself. "Oh, how shall I tell Margaret?"

Mechanically the two rose, and Maurice preceded Arthur, without a single word passing between them, until they stood where two roads met. There Maurice stopped and turned to his companion. "You must pardon me," he said, "if I say very little just now; I must be alone." He put his hand to his head. "I must think. The hotel is over there; you cannot possibly miss the road. I must return to the chalet."

He seemed to be passing through some severe mental struggle, for he paused, then added, "In the mean time, for your kind intention to her and to me I thank you."

He turned away, and in a few moments was lost to Arthur's following gaze in the intricacies of the mountain-paths. Sadly, yet with a certain rising of hope in his spirit, the young man went on to the hotel.

PART V.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED—THE WORKERS REWARDED

CHAPTER I.

WAITING.

Look? I would rather look on thee one minute
Than paradise for a whole day—such days
As are in heaven.

Autumn had fallen upon the little village by the seaside where Margaret was waiting and hoping and longing, with still no tidings, or but very scant ones, of her lost. She and Adèle were left almost alone, for the bleak winds and stormy seas had driven away the few visitors. It was a very different scene from the one which Arthur had looked in upon on that sunny August day not so many weeks before, for now the balmy summer winds had given place to strong blustering gales; the trees, almost bare, shivered in their nakedness; and instead of the soft, continuous murmuring of rippling waters, there came ever and anon to the ear the boom of waves breaking in upon the shore. It was a dreary time. Chill mists and equinoctial gales divided the sea between them, while the dank earth-smell of decaying leaves and dying blossoms made the earth desolate.

The two women in the little cottage, knit together by so strange a tie, fought vigorously against the influence of the season, but there were times when it was too strong for them—times when Adèle would read danger in the stormy seas and long passionately for Arthur's safe return—times when Margaret would fear that her hope had been vain, that never, in all the long life that lay before her, would she see her husband again or know the mystery of his long forgetfulness.

Through it all Margaret and Adèle clung to one another; their mutual friendship was a source of great comfort to both. Adèle was unlike many others of her sex. The knowledge that Margaret was the woman who had first called out her cousin's force of character, instead of making her sick with jealousy, filled her soul with loving reverence for her who had been the cause of this awakening. She never hid her frank admiration, her untiring love and sympathy, from her companion; and what wonder that Margaret returned her feelings, honored her as she deserved, and reckoned her friendship the most precious thing her years of suffering had brought her? They were different, these two who had been thrown in so strange a manner upon one another's society—as different in character as they were in appearance; and perhaps, strange as it may seem, the younger of the two, who seemed little more than a child with her flaxen hair and bright blue eyes and general fragility, was stronger in some ways than the woman of queenly stature, of much experience, of many woes.

In any case, since that evening when Arthur left them the relations between them were partially reversed, for now it was Margaret who leaned upon Adèle for support and comfort. When her courage was about to fail utterly; when, weary and heart-sick, she was ready to arraign God himself for cruelty and injustice; when the long days which would have to pass before anything certain could be known seemed so hard to live through that she would clench her hands and pace up and down, seeking rest and finding none,—then the younger and more inexperienced would bring her strength, would speak with a calm assurance she was far from feeling, would use a gentle authority in enforcing rest that Margaret found it difficult to resist.

"I wonder how it is, Adèle," she said one day when, after a paroxysm of bitter weeping, the young girl had soothed her into something like rest—"I wonder how it is that you have such power? A few moments ago everything seemed hopeless. You tell me to hope, and my courage comes back. What makes you so certain?"

"I scarcely know," replied the young girl; she was silent for a few moments, then added in a low tone, "I believe in God."

Margaret put out her hand; it had grown thin and transparent during these last days: "Darling, I know, but He allows wrong."

"Not for ever," replied Adèle firmly, taking the offered hand in her warm grasp. "Margaret, be patient—your wrong will end—the truth will be known."

"But if *he* does not know it, what will be the use? And perhaps he is dead. Ah, listen!" She raised her hands and pressed them against her ears.

"Only the wind, dear; but why need you mind that? October is a stormy month, and those we love are far inland. Come! I see I must read Arthur's last letter to convince you that the meeting has not taken place on the stormy seas, with only a plank between them and destruction. Confess, now, something like this was working in your brain."

"I *am* very foolish—I know it."

Adèle stooped and kissed her friend: "You are weak, darling. Remember how patient you were with me when my strength seemed as if it would not come. Now it is my turn to keep your courage up; you are wasting away to skin and bone with fretting, Margaret. Have faith!"

"In what, Adèle?"

"In yourself—in God—in the future," replied the young girl quietly.

She rose from her seat by Margaret's side and fetched her Bible. We learn in very different ways. To this young girl, trained from her babyhood to think of nothing better and higher than dress and gayety, than self-pleasing in some form, religion had come of itself.

Adèle had always loved to think of the something that for ever lies beyond this world and its fleeting joys; so it was not strange that in her hour of perplexity she should turn instinctively to this for comfort and help.

The afternoon of that chill October day waned, the last flickering rays of light fled, while the young girl read softly of that beyond—the city that hath no need of the sun, the fair land where night is not.

"Patience," she had said.

"I *will* have patience," whispered Margaret, "even to the end," she added faintly, "for the morning cometh." She paused for a few moments, as if in enjoyment of new rest; but suddenly, as it were, the full import of her thought broke over her: "Earth holds my treasures," she cried passionately. "God forgive me! I *cannot* wish to leave them yet. Adèle, light the lamp and bring that green book from my table. An old story is haunting me to-night. It has followed me in my strange life, for sometimes it seems to me that I have loved the human too much. Will you read it for me, dear?"

She repeated some of the lines in a low tone:

"Then breaking into tears, 'Dear God,' she cried, 'and must we see
All blissful things depart from us or e'er we go to Thee?
Ay, sooth we feel too strong in weal to need Thee on that road,
But woe being come, the soul is dumb that crieth not on God.'"

Adèle's eyes filled with tears: "Not to-night, dear, it sounds so dreary."

"Yes, to-night. I feel as if the good and evil were struggling together in my heart, and I have a certain craving to hear the old story, which long ago, when I was an uncomprehending child, used to move me to tears:

"'Onora! Onora! her mother is calling.'"

Adèle said no more. She began to read the "Lay of the Brown Rosary" in a soft low voice, that trembled often from excess of feeling. It seemed real and possible in the tremulous half light of the little room, the sound of boisterous winds and breaking waves running through it like a vivid illustration of its imagery; Margaret's fair face, in its pure delicate outline, her pale patient hands folded calmly, giving a kind of witness to its truth. She listened with apparent calm, but once or twice her face flushed, and now and then the tears would roll one by one down her pale cheeks.

Adèle read well. She knew how to put the true spirit of the scene into the words that represented them. She came to the third part, the spirits of good round the maiden's bed:

"How hath she sinned?
In bartering love,
God's love, for man's,"

when she was suddenly interrupted.

Margaret had started up, her eyes and cheeks on flame; "There are steps outside. Adèle! Adèle! go and see."

Adèle went to the window, while Margaret shaded the lamp. "A man standing outside," she said, "hunting for the latch of the gate. Be calm, dear; it's only the postman. He promised to come if there should be any letter to-night. He's very good not to have forgotten. And such a night, too! Poor old fellow! I must tell Martha to give him supper."

"But the letter! the letter!" said Margaret, sinking back upon her pillow. The flush of excitement had died out from her cheeks, leaving them deadly pale.

Adèle forgot the letter and the postman. She rushed to her friend's side.

"I thought *he* had come back," said Margaret faintly. "Don't look so frightened, dear; this is nothing," but she moaned as if in pain, "O God! if this is to last much longer I *cannot, cannot* bear it!"

Adèle stooped to raise her friend, and her warm clasping arms spoke boundless love and sympathy: "Be of good courage, Margaret; perhaps this is to say that they are near."

But the young girl's heart sank. What if, after all, their sacrifices and suffering should be in vain? for Margaret was visibly sinking.

It sometimes happens so. The brave heart that has borne unflinchingly a weary weight of woe fails suddenly when hope—but hope that must be waited for—succeeds. And Margaret had been tried almost past endurance by her life of solitude. A glass of water revived her for the moment. She did not faint, and in the interval Martha brought up three letters. Two were from Arthur, the other from Mr. Robinson, who was still acting, or professing to act, as Margaret's legal adviser.

This was set aside for after-perusal. They did not reckon very much upon his zeal and earnestness. But Margaret's letter from Arthur was eagerly seized, almost too eagerly, for when she had opened it the words swam before her eyes; she found it impossible to decipher it.

"Read it, Adèle," she said; "my eyes are dim this evening."

It was the letter that had been written in Moscow—the letter that had begun so joyfully, that had ended in a cloud. Arthur had not let them know in his letter the reason for the sudden discouragement, but the two women read it and their hearts sank.

They had received one letter before this. It had told of the meeting with Laura in Paris. In it, too, Arthur had announced, with all the sanguine assurance of youth, that the next letter, to be written in Moscow, would certainly bring positive news. He could see no reason for doubting this. The second letter had met with certain delays *en route*, and the very length of the interval had in her most courageous moods filled Margaret with hope.

When, therefore, the long looked-for letter came, and heralded nothing but another endless journey, another weary search, her heart sank, her courage failed suddenly.

She turned her face to the wall and wept. "I shall never live to see it," she moaned.

Adèle was bewildered; she scarcely knew how to comfort her friend, for her own heart was sad. This unfolding of another weary age of suspense and delay had disappointed her bitterly. In her despair she turned to the lawyer's letter. It might possibly promise hope from another source.

She read it hastily, then, stooping over her friend, "Listen, Margaret dear; you must be brave and not give way. Mr. Robinson is to be here to-morrow; perhaps he may bring news about Laura."

But the mother shook her head: "No, no; my little one is lost—lost! Child, I tell you, God is punishing me. I have sinned."

"Margaret, be calm. How have you sinned?"

But the young girl trembled as she spoke, there was so intense a sadness in Margaret's face.

She raised her head from the pillow, and throwing back the long waves of yellow hair from her face and eyes looked wildly at her companion. And then she laughed—a low hollow laugh that made Adèle shiver.

"In bartering love, God's love, for man's!" she cried, and leaped from the bed, for the madness of fever was on her. "And what is worse, I do it still," she cried. "Yes, I would barter my soul—my soul, do you hear?—only to see him once"—from a shriek her voice sank into plaintive wailing—"to feel his hand upon my hair as in the old days—to hear him call me love, wife. Oh, Maurice, Maurice!"

Adèle was frightened, but she would not call for assistance. Her tears falling fast, she threw her arms round her friend and tried by gentle force to make her lie down again.

But at first Margaret resisted. "Let me alone," she cried; "none of them understand, for men cannot love like women. I must go myself and tell him or he will never know. *He* might have done wrong—*I* should have loved him still. Dear, I could never have left *you* for these long years without a word, a sign; and what had I done?" Her voice sank, she fell back on the bed. "It was God's will. I loved him more than Heaven—more than goodness."

The paroxysm had exhausted her. Adèle covered her feet with a shawl. Margaret closed her eyes and fell into a troubled sleep, which lasted about half an hour. When she awoke the room was in darkness, only the white moonlight streamed in under the raised blind, and there was the sound of bitter weeping by her bed. She put out her hand: "Adèle, are you there? What is it, dear?"

"I thought you were fast asleep;" and the young girl choked back her sobs courageously.

"But what has happened, Adèle? what makes you cry like this?"

"Don't ask me, please, but try to sleep again."

"Child, you must think me very selfish. Was it on my account you were crying? I think I must have said some strange things before I went to sleep, but I forget what they were—indeed, I sometimes fear my brain is giving way. But, Adèle dear, I can't allow you to grieve for me in this way. Perhaps it was something else. Tell me. Come, I intend to know."

She drew one of Adèle's cold little hands from her face and held it lovingly, then the young girl told out her trouble in a few simple words.

Her religion was the growth of her loving heart; she had no particular doctrines, for so-called theology always seemed to her too hard to be understood, but she believed, in the full simplicity and truth of her young soul, what many religionists by their harsh doctrine practically deny—that God, the Father of spirits, is a merciful God, "tender, compassionate, boundless in loving-kindness and truth." She wept that night because the friend whom she loved so deeply would not take to her soul the comfort of the truth that God loved her.

It had come over Adèle's sympathetic heart that evening like a kind of agony that the loving God is for ever, through the long ages, misunderstood and denied—that while He is calling in His tenderest tones to the stricken, they will look to any comfort rather than His for help in their trouble. "God is angry with them—God is punishing them," when in reality "God is with them—God is loving them." She told it all to Margaret in a voice often broken with tears, and her earnest conviction gave a certain reality to her words.

Margaret's sore heart was soothed. "It may be," she said. "God grant it! Dear, I was beginning to feel Him near, but now the earthly things, the longings of youth, have come back with this delayed hope. They stand between my soul and God; I must long for them more than I long for Him."

"And who told you He would be angry, Margaret? Could He wish you to do what is contrary to nature? He gave you these earthly desires, this longing, this love. I sometimes think"—the young girl's voice sank, she bowed her head reverently—"that Christ became a man for this, not only that *He* might understand us, but that we might know He understands. It is such a good thing; it helps us to bear."

Margaret smiled: "I think it will come. I am better already; but, dear, where did you learn all this wisdom?"

There was a knock at the door which prevented an answer. The landlady's little nephew was standing in the passage, a few choice flowers in his small hands. He wanted to say good-night to Mrs. Grey, and his auntie had sent her some flowers.

It was the best possible diversion. The child's blue eyes smiled up into those of the weary woman, and they brought her pleasant memories. She took the child up on the bed kissed him tenderly and listened to his infant prattle.

Then when the landlady appeared, quiet and respectful, but allowing her honest sympathy to be seen, to ask whether the little boy were troublesome and to say that it was his bedtime, Margaret turned to her comforter with something like hope in her face. "Child," she said, "you are right; God is merciful. I will trust Him."

They slept together that night, for Margaret's nerves were unstrung, she could not bear to be left alone; but both of them slept calmly, and a peace, verily Heaven-born, brooded over the small company of women in their temporary home within the circle of the sea-sounds.

CHAPTER II.

THE LAWYER GAINS HIS POINT

With lips depressed as he were meek,
Himself unto himself he sold:
Upon himself himself did feed—
Quiet, dispassionate and cold.

MR. ROBINSON in the mean time had not been idle. He would certainly never have presented so unsullied a front before the world if he had ever been idle where his own interests were concerned. During those weeks, while L'Estrange and Margaret's child had been wandering—while Arthur had been throwing himself into the task of unravelling the mystery that surrounded Maurice Grey and his desertion—while Margaret, sick at heart, had been waiting and watching—he had been putting all his energy into the task of winding up her affairs in such a way as to make it appear that in their management he had been guilty of nothing but a little pardonable imprudence. He had been obliged to sacrifice some of his own interests in the process, but this was a matter of very small moment.

Mr. Robinson was careful, even as regarded trivial sums, but he was too clever a man of the world not to know the impolicy of the "penny-wise, pound-foolish system." A small sacrifice that would have the effect of impressing the world with his upright character would, he knew, bring in returns fully commensurate to the outlay. He did not, therefore, hesitate to pay up, out of his own pocket, as he magnanimously put it to some highly-impressionable lady clients, that amount of Mrs. Grey's capital which had been lent on insufficient security to the bankrupt trader; but (and this he did not tell the ladies) for the whole transaction he made both sides pay heavily. The man of business was kept under the lawyer's thumb for further use, and Mrs. Grey, out of the capital sum, had to pay not only the expenses, which were heavy, but also certain sundries, including various advances of twenty pounds at a time for maintenance, setting on foot of a search for Mr. Grey and his daughter, letters innumerable, railway journeys and interviews. Mrs. Grey had even the pleasure of defraying the expenses of a trip to Paris taken by her lawyer at the moderate charge of five guineas a day, for the purpose of personally investigating the city with a view to the recovery of Mrs. Grey's daughter. That she had not been met with, either in the Bois de Boulogne or on the Boulevards, was not Mr. Robinson's fault. He carefully frequented both. "Honesty is the best policy." One of the ladies to whom Mr. Robinson mentioned this matter quite incidentally (it illustrated aptly some of her own affairs) put his name down instantly in her will for one thousand pounds; another reported the story to a lately-widowed friend, who at once appointed this upright man her solicitor and confidential adviser. Mr. Robinson held his head higher, and at the next cottage-meeting he attended gave out for the text, "Godliness hath the promise of this life and of that which is to come"—a fact, he proceeded to say, which was strangely borne out by his own late experiences. But this was incidental, a providential side-wind. The real object of his attention at this time was to get rid altogether of Mrs. Grey's affairs, which, as she had the power in her hands of appointing another trustee, he knew it was possible to do. He was anxious, therefore, to press the matter forward, that he might gain her signature acknowledging full satisfaction with his proceedings before any sharper eyes than hers could look into the business and so a contrary advice be given.

It was to accomplish this purpose that Mr. Robinson had planned an interview for the day succeeding that on which Arthur's letter had been received. That morning Margaret was better. The first paroxysm of disappointment had passed. Adèle's words of gentle wisdom had made her almost ashamed of her own impatience. Better than all, perhaps, it was a fine, clear October day. The sun was shining; the bare trees, waving gracefully in the breeze, wrote their delicate tracery against the clear blue sky the sea had fallen to partial rest. Margaret's excitement had exhausted her. She slept late. When she awoke the sun was high in the heavens. Adèle had long left her side, but before she could look round inquiringly the young girl had opened the door gently and was creeping in to see if her friend were awake.

"Come in, Adèle," said Margaret. "Why, it must be late. How is it that you allowed me to sleep so long?"

"I knew it would do you good, and I was right; you look better already. Now, what do you intend to do? Mr. Robinson, you know, is to be here. Do you feel able to see him, or shall I do it for you?"

"No, no, Adèle. You are spoiling me. I must exert myself."

But in spite of her brave words Margaret felt very weak. It was only with old Martha's assistance that she could manage to make herself at all presentable.

The old woman shook her head once or twice as the task of dressing proceeded. "It was pitiable," as she afterward remarked to Jane, "to see a body fallen away like that. Bless the poor soul!" she continued, wiping her eyes, "if they don't find and bring back her folks pretty soon, it's precious little of her'll be left, what with fretting and one thing and another."

In these days Margaret would always be dressed with care. She had a kind of feeling that her husband might return suddenly, and she wished him to see her at her best. She had left off the black which she had worn during her widowhood, and had returned to the pretty morning-dresses, the soft flowing draperies that in the old days Maurice had loved.

On this morning Adèle thought she had never seen her friend look so fair. Her dress was of gray cashmere. It fitted closely to her slight form and flowed round her in ample folds. Her hair, gathered up at the back into thick coils, rippled off in waves of shimmering gold from her brow, so that the pure outlines of her face were clearly marked. It was held back by a broad band of blue ribbon, over which fell lappets of choice lace. Her face seemed perfectly transparent, it was so delicately fair; and the absence of color, the brightness fever had given to her eyes, the general fragility of her appearance, made her look many years younger than she really was.

When the tedious business of dressing was over she went into the little sitting-room, and standing with her hands resting on the back of a chair for support, looked earnestly into the mirror that hung over the fireplace.

"Adèle," she said, "I am changed. There are lines in my face, there are dark shadows under my eyes. I am a poor, pale, colorless thing. If he were to come back now, what would he say?"

"That you are more beautiful than ever," replied the young girl impulsively, looking at her friend with the enthusiastic admiration that belonged to her susceptible nature and her eighteen years. "Margaret, how can you say such things?"

But Margaret did not answer. She still looked meditatively at the mirror: "*If* he cannot love me, *if* he have not loved me for these long years, I would almost rather he did not come at all. It would be dreadful to meet his indifference. Adèle, duty might bring him."

"And if it did, Margaret, something else would keep him."

"But it is such a long time! He may have forgotten. He may have—" "formed other ties," she was about to add, but she checked herself suddenly. "I am talking nonsense," she said hastily, "I must find something to do."

She got her work. It was a child's frock, of the same delicate material and color as that she wore.

"Maurice's favorite color," she said. "I want to have it ready for Laura when she comes back. It will go well with her golden curls, and she wants something new. Dear little one! I wonder has she forgotten me? I scarcely think so."

Adèle walked to the window to hide her tears. In the vague uncertainty, in the view of possible disappointment, there was something more pathetic in this mood of Margaret's than in that of the preceding night. She was just in time to meet Mr. Robinson's cold eyes. He had found the garden-gate open, and was walking up the narrow grass-bordered path.

One of the windows of the parlor where they were sitting opened on to the garden; the lawyer bowed politely when he saw the young lady, and with his usual obtuseness cut short the ceremony of ringing and gaining admittance in the usual way, by crossing the greensward and tapping in his peculiarly lively manner at the window.

Adèle turned round suddenly to prepare her friend for this summary entrance and to recover her own inclination for tears. Margaret's face reassured her. For the first time since Arthur had gone and the fever of hope-deferred had taken possession of her, Margaret looked really happy; her fingers, almost transparent, were flying backward and forward with the busy needle; she was looking down upon her work, which began to assume the appearance of a child's frock, with a smile. In her whole attitude there was rest.

The woman's work had taken its effect upon her mind. To be working for her lost darling made her recovery and return seem real and near to her. It brought back the quiet days when the child had been her one comfort and joy.

"Mr. Robinson is here," said Adèle, crossing the room. Margaret looked up, and met a frank smile from the outside of the still closed window. She rose, threw up the sash, and the lawyer entered, hat in hand.

"Good-morning, ladies," he said cordially. "I was beginning to fear, from the stern appearance of our young friend here, that I was to be left out in the cold. Ha! ha! not a pleasant position on a frosty day. Mrs. Grey, you look thin; not fretting, I hope, though indeed I can scarcely wonder. The absurd way in which your affairs are being conducted is really enough to worry you."

At this point Adèle looked indignant and Margaret tried to protest. But the lawyer waved his hand: "One moment, Mrs. Grey; I wish to make no reflections. As I stated before, in my interview with Mr. Forrest (he took up no less than two hours of my time on a very busy day; this is the sole grudge I bear him);" the lawyer showed his teeth—"as I stated before, Mrs. Grey, I wash my hands altogether of this part of the business. I did my best; my poor services were rejected wholesale, I may say. As a Christian I forgive; yes indeed, what I have come to tell you of my after-conduct will prove that I bear no malice. But it hit me hard—hit me hard."

He touched the region of the body where the centre of feeling is always supposed to reside, and looked sentimental.

"Pray sit down, Mr. Robinson. I am sorry your feelings were hurt in any way," said Margaret with gentle dignity; "and I know quite well that my kind friend, Mr. Forrest, is apt to be a little impulsive. Let me assure you that I am not ungrateful for the various services you have rendered me." Poor Margaret! she was thinking, with a kind of compunction, about that interview in London and the sundry advances for maintenance which had been a great boon to her at the time. "His heart is kind," she said to herself; "we may have judged him harshly." Then to him: "I must honestly confess that I was inclined to blame you for lukewarmness in the last matter I confided to you: I mean the search for my husband and child."

"Lukewarmness, Mrs. Grey!" Mr. Robinson lifted his hands in a kind of holy horror; and surely it was a superabundance of honesty that shone out from his eyes. "You really astonish me. In fact I am at a loss to understand you at all. Let me pass the facts of the case in review"—his voice grew stern—"perhaps then the blame will rest upon the right shoulders. If I remember rightly— Be so good as to correct any misstatements; I like to be accurate, but naturally my mind is so full of other matters. Well, as I was saying, you consulted me—in this very room, I think. I promised to do my best, letting you know results. Thereupon you placed in my care certain trinkets. I took them simply because I thought them safer in my strong box than here with you in this lonely place. As to making any use of them, why, Mrs. Grey, facts prove the contrary. Mr. Forrest had only to demand them on your part. Without hesitation I restored them intact. To proceed: as soon as I return (remember, I have not the faintest clue), I consult a detective, put him, as far as possible, on the track, and, further, demand an interview with Mr. Grey's solicitor—perfectly unsatisfactory, professes to know nothing. I take various other measures —needless to enter into detail. The principles of what one may call the private-inquiry business are not easy to explain, especially to ladies. I think I obtain a clue, but is it for me to torture you with half revelations? I wait for a little more certainty, and in the interval in dashes Mr. Forrest, states that you have given over these matters into his hands, that your confidence is shaken, that affairs would be strictly looked into."

Here Mr. Robinson made a dramatic pause and looked sternly at his repentant client. "Mrs. Grey," he continued, "do you know what was my impulse at that moment? Your affairs, as you are well aware, are—or I should say *were*—in a complicated condition. I felt inclined to take no more trouble, to let your new friends have the burden and responsibility; but"—he lifted his eyes sanctimoniously to the ceiling —"I do nothing upon impulse. Further consideration showed me that to act in so hasty a manner would be unworthy of myself, inconsistent with my character as a Christian man. I *wish* to 'adorn my profession in all things.' Whether in this I am successful or no is not for me to say."

Through all her penitence Margaret was growing impatient of this long harangue, and Adèle's face showed that she, at least, would not hear it much longer.

Mrs. Grey broke the little interlude short: "And pray, Mr. Robinson, what did you do?"

"Set to work immediately to disentangle your affairs. But, mind you, a man may go to a *certain* length; self-respect forbids him to go further. What I said to myself was this: I am distrusted, I must resign my position."

Margaret was about to interrupt him.

"Allow me. Before you answer, I must give my reasons, both from my side of the question and from yours, for the advisability of the step which I may say is irrevocably determined in my own mind. We shall take the reasons from your point of view first. Mr. Forrest has your full confidence. You acknowledge so far as this?" Margaret bowed. "You took measures with him totally unknown to me—a breach of confidence—but this I should have been content to waive. Ladies are naturally impulsive. To proceed with our reasons. Mr. Forrest distrusts and dislikes me—impossible to say why. He is a worldling. It may be that a few words of warning and exhortation which I felt it my bounden duty to give him on the occasion of our last meeting have something to do with it. It is a matter of small import, except in so far as it concerns you. Mr. Forrest has inspired you with distrust; he will do so further; possibly your husband also, for I hear he has succeeded in finding out something through Mr. Edwards. But of this you doubtless know more than I. Under such circumstances it will be far wiser for you to allow me at once to give up the management of your affairs. My reasons for desiring it are many of them personal. I will not enter into them, as I fear I have tired you already. If you like I can proceed to open out my accounts and give a rapid sketch of my proceedings, that you may sign this document with your eyes open. Your friend looks dissatisfied; I know ladies often object to signing. Let me reassure her: this is nothing but a deed of release, to pave the way for transfer papers which are now being prepared."

"You are quite right to withdraw, Mr. Robinson," replied Margaret with dignity, "if you feel as you do, but in the mean time, until my husband's return—"

The lawyer looked at her curiously. Then he was only just in time. Certain news had arrived.

Margaret's face expressed nothing. "—Who," she continued, "will manage my affairs?"

"It is on this very matter that I desired to consult you."

"Would it not be better to wait?"

"For the actual conclusion of the business?—yes, if you see fit. We could even have the papers ready, leaving the names a blank, until such time as you can consult your friends. Still, I must beg you to conclude the business that has brought me here to-day. I am anxious, without delay, to pay into your account at the bank the sum which has been matter of question between us—deducting from it, of course, as was previously arranged, the few trivial sums forwarded, the expenses of search and the inevitable legal charges. Of these I have brought you a full account, and shall be much obliged by your looking over it."

Margaret sighed: "I make no doubt it is all as it should be, Mr. Robinson."

She opened it listlessly, and the long rows of figures swam before her eyes.

"I should not have ventured to bring it had it not been so, Mrs. Grey. Still, it would be satisfactory. You will observe that I have myself paid up the sum so unfortunately invested. It may be I shall be reimbursed out of the debtor's property —it may be not; this I am content to leave. You will also observe that out of the capital sum I have deducted the total of this account. All is clearly stated in this document, which I am anxious for you to sign."

Adèle, while the lawyer was stating his views, had been listening and observing. At the moment when he brought his last harangue to a climax, Margaret was sitting at her writing-table. The account lay open at her side. The deed of release, fairly copied on parchment, was under her hand. She felt too utterly indifferent to all these business-matters to be able to question anything that was told her. All she desired was the cessation of this wearisome importunity. She dipped her pen in the ink. Adèle saw how it was with her. Her younger, stronger spirit recoiled from the oppression. She leaned forward suddenly and drew the pen from her friend's hand:

"Margaret, take my advice—sign nothing."

Margaret smiled, and then she sighed wearily. In this matter she would have preferred taking her own way, but she gave in.

"Impulsive child!" she said, a slight tone of irritation in her voice; then, turning to the lawyer, "Perhaps, Mr. Robinson, even for form's sake it will be wiser for me to try and make out what all this means. But for the moment I feel slightly bewildered. You must allow me to think over it. You are staying at the hotel, I suppose? If you will give us the plea sure of your company to lunch we can further discuss this in the afternoon."

The lawyer rose. Margaret's invitation was a dismissal. He was obliged to submit to the delay, although it was a matter of great importance to him that the business which had brought him to Middlethorpe should be settled at once; but Adèle's sharp eyes, rendered far-seeing by love and anxiety, were watching him narrowly, and he would show no sign of anxiety. "Take your own time, my dear Mrs. Grey," he replied benignantly. "You must have seen and understood all along that my special object in my business dealings with ladies is to persuade them to do everything intelligently—comprehending, that is to say, the why and the wherefore of the step they are advised to take. I find some *too* ready. They throw themselves entirely on their lawyer's superior knowledge, increasing, of course, our responsibility, and this I deprecate. Others"—he looked across at Margaret with his charming smile—"are inclined to be too timorous. They take fright at the sight of parchment, and when asked to sign imagine they are being defrauded of some right. Your position, Mrs. Grey, is the wisest—indeed I may say the most satisfactory to one's self, for when, by repeated explanations, I have made all this perfectly clear to your mind, my position will be the more tenable. Then if in the future subject of discussion should arise—which, understand me, I do not apprehend—I shall be able to call upon you and our young friend here as witnesses to the truth of what I assert—namely, that you did everything with your eyes open."

The lawyer bowed himself out of the room. This time he had struck the right chord. To Margaret, in her state of bewilderment, the "repeated explanations" sounded like a kind of threat. Her thoughts and hopes were all engrossed, given to the one absorbing subject, and this forced attention to foreign matters was very irksome.

"If Maurice come back," she said to herself, "he will manage everything for me. If not"—and at the bare supposition all her life and energy seemed to pass, leaving her cold and spiritless—"if not, what does anything matter?"

She turned to the table. Mr. Robinson, it should be observed, had pocketed the papers. He had not thought it well, probably, that the ladies should examine them without the commentary of his instructive explanations. Mr. Robinson professed to think little of the female intellect, probably because, as a general rule, he found ladies gullible.

Not finding the papers, Margaret arose and walked to the window.

"Adèle, my dear," she said after a few moments' pause, "I *must* sign this." In her voice were the querulous tones of weakness. "That man's explanations will send me wild. Can you give me any solid reason for objecting?"

"Only, that he has no right, in the present state of affairs, to ask you to sign anything. It all sounds plausible enough, but *I* think that if the man were really honest he would wait for this 'winding up,' as he calls it, until your husband's return."

"You see he wishes to pay over this sum, whatever it may be, at once," returned Margaret. She was inclined to take the lawyer's part. "I really think the man is honest, and certainly until just lately he has been a very kind friend to me—a friend in need."

"But why does he come in this sneaking way," persisted the young girl, "to make you write that you are satisfied with him? I may be wrong, but it seems to me that he only wants to stop your mouth and prevent accounts from being looked into by your friends."

"My dear child, are you not a *little* unjust? Confess, now, that Arthur prejudiced you. Mr. Robinson's vulgarity is, I know, quite enough to account for your cousin's dislike, and some of the things he did had a bad appearance; still, that need not make us all put him down as dishonest."

"But, Margaret, what can be his motive?"

"How can I tell?" Again Margaret's voice sounded querulous. She said nothing more for some time, and Adèle forbore to press the subject; she feared that already she had gone too far. It was Margaret who opened it again, for her mind had been working. "Allowing," she said, almost apologetically, "that this signature is unnecessary I think I may as well oblige Mr. Robinson, if only in acknowledgment of his former kindness."

"Kindness!" The young girl shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly, but all further discussion was stopped by the return of Mr. Robinson and the appearance of lunch. During the meal the lawyer made himself, as he thought, perfectly charming, but after it was over he returned to the attack.

Margaret, as it will be seen, was predisposed in favor of what he desired; Adèle had done her best to prevent it, but in vain. The wily man gained his point. Margaret signed the deed with full knowledge of its contents. Mr. Robinson was protected, and his mind was once more at rest.

It was thus with him always. His escapes were wonderful. As at this point his connection with Margaret's history ended altogether, for that cooked-up account and the transactions which led to its concoction continued to be a sealed book, it may be as well, perhaps, to let him once for all disappear from our pages. He is practicing still, and it is more than probable that the Robinson name, on whose lustre he prides himself, has never been dimmed by action of his, although among solicitors of a higher class he has the name of being a sharp practitioner. He may be known by his frank address, his manly appearance, his deep and outspoken conviction of the necessity of not living for this world alone. He has been an actor in the play so long that at last he has almost come to believe he is what he makes so loud a profession of being.

Let him go on his way rejoicing. If other and more really honest people understood, as he does, the grand art of taking care of themselves, there would be less misery in the world. It may be, however, that it would be a doubtful advantage.

The poetry of chivalry and romance has died out in a great measure from our "Merrie Land," but woe worth the day when selfishness becomes the rule, and what Mr. Robinson would term "stupid Quixoterie" the exception!

CHAPTER III.

THREATENED SEPARATION.

The rainbow dies in heaven, and not on earth;
But love can never die: from world to world,
Up the high wheel of heaven, it lives for aye.

ADÈLE was in despair. By that evening's post a letter had arrived from her mother. Mrs. Churchill was on her way to Scarborough, and her niece was travelling with her. They were sleeping at York that night. On the following day they would call for Adèle at Middlethorpe, and take her on with them. Again and again the date of her return to her mother's care had been deferred, in obedience to her wishes repeatedly and earnestly expressed.

Mrs. Churchill, always indulgent to what she looked upon as Adèle's whims, had in consequence spent the month of September in Brighton, but her forbearance would extend no further. It was high time, she thought, that her daughter's absurd seclusion should come to an end. Her letter was written in a very decided manner. She wished to leave no loophole for excuse or further delay.

It seemed to Adèle that the announcement had come just at the wrong time. In the long, heart-sickening anxiety of suspense, Margaret's strength was failing, and the young girl knew she was her chief comfort and help. She trembled to think how the much-tried endurance of her friend might fail if she were thrown suddenly on her own resources.

And Margaret had been given into her care by Arthur. The patient fulfilling of her task was a pledge of her love. It was not a hard task, for Adèle's affection, which had partaken of the fervid nature of passion in the admiration of her young heart for Margaret's beauty, in the pity which had arisen on that first day of their meeting at the sight of her distress, had taken perhaps a calmer tone during these weeks of close intimacy, but withal a much deeper and firmer root.

Adèle loved her friend so truly that she would willingly have sacrificed any happiness of her own for her good, and the idea of leaving her, of returning to the old rounds of tedious gayety, of knowing that in her absence the strong, brave heart was failing, the weakened spirit was giving way, even when the end might be very near, made her heart ache and throb.

She would not tell Margaret that night, for the business and discussion of the day had wearied her, but there was an almost unusual tenderness in her manner, which Margaret attributed to her fear of having unduly urged the non-signature of Mr. Robinson's papers.

Old Martha was ready at her post to help Margaret to bed. Adèle sent her away peremptorily. "No one shall touch you to-night but me," she said, stooping over the arm-chair in which Margaret was sitting, and loosening her hair with gentle fingers; then, as Margaret smilingly protested, "Just for this once," she pleaded; and her friend did not see, for the long, blinding tresses, that slow tears were falling one by one from the young girl's eyes.

There was exceeding comfort in the passing to and fro of those busy fingers, for their every touch spoke eloquently of love. This it was that Margaret felt. Once she caught one of the busy hands and pressed it to her lips.

"What should I do without you, Adèle?" she said softly. "Little one, I begin to fear I am loving you too much. My loves are unfortunate. It is the old story of the fair gazelle. Scold me well; I deserve it for my sentimental folly; still, the feeling is here—I can't get rid of it."

Adèle had to choke back her tears before she could answer When she did her voice was slightly husky: "I don't think loves can ever be unfortunate—quite altogether, I mean—for you know to lose for a time is not to lose for always, and where there is love, real true love, there must be lasting." She paused for a moment, as if in earnest struggle to express herself worthily, and then her voice grew more earnest and her eyes seemed to deepen: "It is charity—love—that abideth—the only earthly feeling we can never do without."

She had finished brushing and combing Margaret's long hair; she was sitting on a stool at her feet gazing into the fire.

"Adèle," said Margaret, "you are wiser than I, or perhaps there's something altogether wrong about me. I cannot take the comfort you do out of these generalities. Child, child,' her voice grew intensely earnest, "it is not this beautiful something, this 'charity which abideth,' that I want; it is my personal loves—my husband, my child."

The young girl looked up into her eyes; she answered with the calm assurance of faith: "Margaret, be calm: you shall have them. But do you know I never look upon all these things as generalities; if love is to last, our personal loves are to last too." She sighed "I know I express myself badly. I wish I could make you understand what I mean."

"I think I *do* understand," said Margaret thoughtfully. "Adèle," she said after a pause, during which perhaps almost the very same thought had been passing through their minds, "our love, yours and mine and your cousin's, the strange tangle which your straightforwardness and self-forgetfulness unravelled, is certainly of the lasting kind. The future may throw us widely apart, but I think that neither here nor hereafter can it ever be the same as if we had not loved."

This time Adèle did not answer, because she could not. The shadow of that dreadful separation was on her spirit. After a few moments' silence she said lightly that Margaret had talked quite enough—that it was time for her to rest; which dictum Margaret obeyed with great willingness.

The next day was that fixed upon by Mrs. Churchill for her visit. Adèle could no longer delay letting Margaret know that a summons from her mother had come; but the morning is generally more favorable to hopefulness than the evening. Adèle had begun to think matters were not so desperate as they looked. Possibly she might obtain further respite. She took in the unwelcome letter with Margaret's breakfast-tray, which had been delicately arranged by her own hands.

"Adèle, you must go," was Margaret's comment on the letter. And she tried not to show how sorely she would miss her comforter.

Adèle was slightly wounded: "Do you really mean it, Margaret?"

"I do indeed, dear. Your mother is quite right; you have sacrificed yourself too long."

"And *you* can think I have been sacrificing myself!" said the young girl. "But no, you only mean to tease me."

There was something of the disquieting jealousy of that feeling which is always supposed to be more engrossing than mere friendship in her further words: "Perhaps you would not even miss me, Margaret?"

But the tears Margaret could not restrain, the sudden weariness in her pale face, spoke more eloquently than words. Adèle threw herself down on her knees by her friend's side: "Forgive me, darling, but if you only knew—"

"—All the tenderness of this warm young heart," and Margaret smiled faintly, resting her hand, as if in silent blessing, on the bowed head.

"But look, dear," she continued after a pause, "your mother is coming, and I am anxious to see her, so she must not find me in bed. Will *you* help me to dress this morning?"

Adèle rose and brushed away her tears. "How stupid I am!" she cried, "and really I didn't intend to be so silly today, for, Margaret, I was just thinking— Mamma is so good and kind, she generally lets me do as I like; then, you see, she has never met you. I mean to dress you as you were dressed yesterday, and I want you to put forth all your fascinations. The result will be that mamma won't have the heart to carry me off."

"But, Adèle—"

"But, Margaret. Put yourself in my hands, madam. Remember I am responsible for your safe-keeping to somebody —my somebody, not yours, Margaret. By the bye, I will urge Arthur's wishes. Mamma never likes to offend *him*."

And so Adèle rattled on to hide her true, deep feelings, while once more she ministered tenderly to the friend she loved.

Mrs. Churchill, impatient as the time drew nearer to see her daughter again, had left York by an early train, and Margaret and Adèle had not been long seated over their work in the little parlor before a travelling carriage, heavily laden with luggage, drove up to the door. She had brought her carriage and horses so far by rail, her intention being to post for the remainder of the way.

It was long since Margaret had met any stranger, and she felt a little nervous when the rattle of wheels came to her ears; but as from her station by the parlor-window she caught a sight of Mrs. Churchill's pleasant, kindly face, some of her painful anticipations fled.

Adèle had run down the garden-path. She brought her mother in to introduce her to her friend.

The good Mrs. Churchill had been rather curious to see Margaret. Adèle's enthusiasm and Arthur's boyish admiration had made her look for something remarkable, but she was scarcely prepared for the refinement, the style, the exquisite grace of her daughter's friend. It was a rare combination, even in those circles in which the rich and highly-connected widow moved.

Mrs. Churchill knew enough of the world to be quite sure at once that she was in the house of a lady—not only highly born and bred, but accustomed to the usages of society. Her good sense and kindly feeling led her to treat her hostess with all due deference.

"I have long wished to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, Mrs. Grey," she said when Margaret had persuaded her to divest herself of bonnet and shawl, "I have heard so much about you from these enthusiastic children of mine. I call them my children, because Arthur has been almost like my own son, and I presume you are in the confidence of this little girl, and that she has let out her secret." Mrs. Churchill looked at Margaret rather curiously.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Grey quietly, drawing down Adèle, who had been hovering about her nervously, to a seat by her side. "I heard long ago, both from your daughter and nephew, of this engagement; and much as I admire Mr. Forrest, I cannot but think, knowing your daughter as I do, that he is a very fortunate man."

Adèle blushed: "Margaret, be quiet; you shouldn't say such things." But her smile belied her words; it was so radiant that it transfigured her face.

Her mother turned to her: "Adèle, my dear, do you know that you ought to be very much obliged to Mrs. Grey for her long hospitality? Now I look at you I am surprised; I never saw such a change. When you left London you were colorless and sickly."

"Mamma, mamma!" protested Adèle, "how very uninteresting!"

But Mrs Churchill persisted: "Yes, my dear, I speak the bare truth; now your animation has come back, you have gained flesh and color, you are *absolutely* a different being. Mrs. Grey, what have you been doing with her?"

Margaret smiled: "I am so glad you think her looking well, and that her visit here has done her good, for I was beginning to think myself selfish for keeping her so long in this lonely place. I suppose the fresh sea-air has worked the miracle."

"The cure is not quite accomplished, mamma," said Adèle coaxingly; but Margaret interrupted her:

"We can talk about that presently, dear; just now your mother wants rest and refreshment. Would you mind hurrying Jane on with lunch for me?"

She turned to Mrs. Churchill: "Our establishment is small, and I have been delicate lately, so your daughter kindly helps me in many little ways."

"Small indeed!" thought Mrs. Churchill, but she would not have said so for the world. She was far too much of the real lady to be able to take upon herself any fine-lady airs of superiority, and then she began to interest herself strangely in her daughter's friend. Mrs. Churchill would have been very much displeased could she have heard herself called impulsive; indeed, it was only in a certain way that she was so. Her impulses were generally inspired by some tolerably solid reasons. In this case her keen eye had instantly detected the lady, also the absence of all those qualities which go to make up the *intriguante.* This set her at ease at once, while the gentleness, the evident weakness, the traces of profound suffering, moved her kind heart as it had not been moved for long. She had not been in the cottage half an hour before, with true motherliness of intent, she made up her mind to take Mrs. Grey in hand.

"I am glad to hear Adèle has been of any service to you," was her answer to Margaret, cordially spoken, and then she looked at Mrs. Grey as she had looked at her daughter. "I am sorry to hear of this delicacy, Mrs. Grey; you certainly look far from well, but I think so lonely a place as this would kill me in a few months. Why not try a change—a little gayety, for instance? Now, if you would allow me to return your hospitality to my daughter by taking you with us to Scarborough, I really think you would find the change would do you good. Then a little cod-liver-oil, quinine and port-wine, steel— But perhaps you are taking some of these?"

Margaret smiled: "Thank you very much for your kind interest in my health. No, I take none of these things, and I scarcely think they could do me good. As to a change, you are very good to propose it; I fear at present I could enjoy nothing. I could not enter into general society; I should only be a burden on your hands."

Mrs. Churchill looked across at Margaret's pale face and warmed into sympathy and interest: "But this is a dreadful state of things, Mrs. Grey. Nothing so insidious, I can assure you, as the creeping on of general ill-health; you ought to do something. Have you consulted a doctor?"

"A doctor could do me no good. My dear Mrs. Churchill, pray don't distress yourself on my account; I think you know enough of my history to understand me when I say that my illness is far more mental than physical. These weeks, which are bringing me hope, have been almost more trying to me than the years that went before."

"And how long is this state of thing to be supposed to last?" cried the impulsive and warm-hearted lady. "Now, Mrs. Grey, *will* you take my advice? I am many years older than you—old enough, I imagine, to be your mother. You look incredulous. Well, have it your own way. They say I bear my years well, and I believe that in this case the *on dits* are more correct than usual. You will allow, at least, that I have larger experience of the world than you. Shall I give you my secret—the true elixir of life, my dear? Never allow yourself to feel too deeply. Feelings have been the ruin of some of the finest constitutions."

"But what if they cannot be helped?" said Margaret, who was smiling through a half inclination to tears.

"My dear (*child* I was about to say, but I don't wish to offend you), an effort should be made, for what does all the crying over spilt milk mean?" This was a favorite theme with

Mrs. Churchill. "Why, as I have told Adèle a thousand times, to fret one's self into a premature death because things don't go altogether as one could wish is clearly nothing more nor less than flying in the face of Providence; for how did we get our health and strength, and all the rest of it? and if we acknowledge that these are gifts of Providence, ought we to trifle with them? Come now, Mrs. Grey, what have you to say?" Her voice softened as she looked at the pale face and fragile form. "You must excuse me, my dear. You see I am given to speaking my mind, and I am interested in you; so it comes naturally somehow to speak to you as I might to this wilful little girl of mine." For Adèle had come in during the latter part of Mrs. Churchill's harangue. She was listening with real pleasure to the energetic words, for she knew her mother well enough to be aware that she never took the trouble of lecturing in this manner any one who had not first made great way in her affections.

"This is mamma's pet subject, Margaret," she said; "what have *you* to say? I always find her arguments unanswerable, but then they never converted me."

Margaret smiled: "I have to say, Adèle, that your mother is perfectly right, that I deserve every word of her lecture, and that I intend to make an effort in the way of getting rid of these tiresome feelings and becoming strong again."

"Only if you have me to help you, Margaret," pleaded Adèle.

But Margaret shook her head: "No, no; I have no right to keep you longer from your mother."

Adèle turned pleadingly to Mrs. Churchill: "Mamma, mamma, leave me here a *little* longer."

"Your 'littles' are elastic, Adèle. For how many weeks have you been saying this?"

"And I suppose I shall say the same"—the young girl looked up saucily at her mother, blushing ever so slightly—"until Arthur comes back, mamma. *He* wishes me to stay and take care of Margaret."

Mrs. Churchill was in a very good humor; she laughed outright: "You are certainly a pretty pair, and very well adapted to the task of taking care of yourselves. When that event, which you are always thrusting in my face, really happens, I shall have to engage an elderly female of strong common sense to look after you both and keep you in order—a pair of babies!"

"But, mamma, you haven't answered me."

"Mrs. Grey says nothing, Adèle; perhaps she is tired of you, or perhaps—which to my mind would be the best of all—you could persuade her to change her mind and become our guest at Scarborough."

Adèle's eyes glistened. Certainly her mother must have taken a strong as well as sudden fancy to her friend: "Oh, mamma, you have asked Margaret to stay with us? How good of you!"

Mrs. Churchill turned to her hostess in mock despair: "I believe this foolish child thinks I had nothing but her fancies in view. You must excuse her, Mrs. Grey; the excitement seems to have put her slightly off her head. Let me assure you once more that, purely for your own sake, I shall be most delighted if you will become our guest until your future is a little more decided."

Margaret put out her hand; she was touched by Mrs. Churchill's delicate kindness. "Thank you a thousand times," she said gently; "if I were even in a fit state for travelling I should not hesitate to take advantage of your kind offer, so attractive in every way. But Adèle will tell you how it is with me at times; I cannot even dress myself. No; I must say good-bye to Adèle, with many thanks both to her and to you, and return to my lonely life. I hope it may soon be over."

"*What* may soon be over?" Mrs. Churchill turned round sharply, for there was a sad ring in the voice, which Margaret had striven to render absolutely calm. She met Mrs. Grey's quiet smile. "I see you mean that you believe your husband will soon return, but I do wish people would say what they mean." There was something of fretfulness in Mrs. Churchill's voice; she did not like to be puzzled, and her daughter's friend was puzzling her.

"I really think," she continued meditatively, "that my best plan would be to put up here at the hotel for a few days. By the bye, Adèle, I left Mary there; I would not bring her on here until I knew more certainly about your arrangements

Yes, I think that will do. You and she could amuse your selves together, and I should like very much to try the effect of quinine and port wine on Mrs. Grey. I brought a hamper of our own wine with me—exceedingly fortunate, as it turns out."

Margaret was weak. Do what she would she could not prevent the tears from filling her eyes. "You are too good to me," she said; "how shall I thank you?"

"By trying to get strong, my dear, and remembering first of all (you see you begin by breaking my rules) to take things quietly is the best policy. Now, Adèle, put on your hat and drive to the hotel. Make them unload the carriage and bring Mary back in it. Are we trespassing too much, Mrs. Grey? You young people will have plenty to talk about, so you need not hurry back. Mrs. Grey in the mean time must give me some account of her symptoms. It may be that the worldly wisdom of a worldly old woman will do as much to help her as the romantic enthusiasm of the young folk who in the present day rule the roast."

Adèle obeyed her mother to the letter. She left her and Margaret alone together for a good hour. She returned to find them fast friends. The cheerful optimism of the elder lady had strengthened the younger considerably, for Margaret wanted bracing, and Mrs. Churchill's sound common-sense was like a blast of north wind: it swept away sundry vapors, it invigorated the heart that a succession of evils had rendered distrustful of good. And Margaret's pathetic story, her truth, her goodness, her life of devotion—for all these had, insensibly to herself, shone out in her simple narrative—filled her hearer with admiration, elevated her conception of human nature, made her believe (a humanizing belief to many natures), in looking back upon her own mistrust, that her judgment was not always infallible.

For a whole week—and it was a real act of self-sacrificing friendship—Mrs. Churchill remained in the quiet village by the sea. The season was late, so she made up her mind to give up Scarborough and return from Middlethorpe to London. She dosed Margaret abundantly with quinine and port wine, she braced her mind by vigorous common sense, well-grounded cheerfulness and antipathetic banishment of anything approaching morbidness or so-called sentiment. When she left she had the satisfaction of seeing her patient better. It is almost needless to add that the kind-hearted lady had not the heart to deprive Margaret of her friend. Adèle remained at the cottage till the chill winds of early winter swept the waters, while still no certain tidings came to them of their wanderers.

CHAPTER IV.

A DREAM INTERRUPTED AND A STRANGE REVELATION MADE.

Just as I thought I had caught sight of heaven,
It came to naught, as dreams of heaven on earth
Do always.

THE Alpine mountains again—"silences of everlasting hills"—Nature and man face to face in the quiet, stealthy creeping on of night!

Maurice Grey sat in his little chalet alone; no friend was near to catch the outflowings of his heart—no watcher, not even a faithful servant, to note the changes that followed one another over his face. The untouched meal, prepared by old Marie, was on the table; he sat before his desk facing the little window, and looked out with sad, weary eyes.

For more than an hour he had been thinking, reviewing the tale Arthur had told him, trying frantically to rend the net of mystery that surrounded him, but trying in vain. A letter was under his hand. He had read it over by the failing light, and then crushed it together in his strong grasp. It was an old, faded, yellow paper which had evidently lain for years in his desk, but the sting of that it contained was still as fresh as on the first day when it had been read. The letter was one of those anonymous productions which perhaps show up in more lurid light than anything else the depths of cowardly spite that lie hidden in the hearts of men. This particular one, to give it its due, was well put together and plausible.

The writer began by acknowledging cordially the apparent cowardice of the step he had taken. Necessity and strong feeling were urged as the excuse. He represented himself as one who owed a debt of gratitude to Mr. Grey; it was therefore peculiarly painful to see him imposed upon. For in purport it was an accusation, cleverly drawn up, implying more than it revealed against Maurice Grey's wife. The history of stolen meetings between her and her former lover, of whose residence in England Mr. Gray was aware, was circumstantially given. They coincided strangely, as Maurice remembered with a pang almost as bitter as that first one had been, with Margaret's comings and goings; but further, a certain test was offered. It was proposed that on that very evening the husband should profess to leave his wife, that instead of returning to London he should remain in Ramsgate, and that if, at a specified time, he should not find her and the foreigner together, he might throw aside all that the letter contained as unworthy of belief. Maurice was naturally jealous. His wife's unusual beauty, the difficulty of winning her, the knowledge that he had not been the first to possess her heart, combined to make him distrustful. Instead of showing her the letter or treating it with merited contempt, he was weak enough to fall into the snare.

The event had been planned with a fatal accuracy. He found L'Estrange at Margaret's feet, and in the agony of wounded love, of despairing rage, left her altogether. For four long years he had wandered hopelessly and aimlessly, not daring, in case his worst fears should receive terrible confirmation, to find out anything about the woman whom through it all he loved so madly. And now, when, as he believed, his heart had grown callous, when he thought his retreat was surely hidden from all his former friends, this earnest champion came forward, sent evidently by her to plead her cause, to assure him of her continued love and unwearied faithfulness, to recall him to her side. But the mystery was unexplained. All she offered was a simple declaration of the falsehood of that of which Maurice believed he held incontrovertible proof.

What could it all mean? Was it, he asked himself—and his brows were fiercely knit—a plot to betray him? Did she wish to regain her position, only that she might the more surely carry on her intrigues? Had her paramour wearied her, and in his turn been cast off? He thought, but suddenly, as on the preceding evening, there came, like a gleam of light through his dark thoughts, the memory of that pale, pure face.

The strong man bowed his head, and tears such as only men can weep found their way to his burning eyelids. He covered his face with his hands. "It is possible," he cried—"possible! O my God, I may have been wrong." As he spoke he trembled like a child, this man who knew the world, whose wide experience had made him a cynic.

But if the thought held pain, it had also infinite sweetness. That first spasm past, Maurice gave way to it. He looked up again and the pale snows met his gaze. There was a soft, tender light in his dark eyes. Between them and those pale snows that fair, sad face was shining. "Margaret!" he whispered.

The man was weary with his mental struggles, overwrought by the physical exertions of the day. He allowed hope in its soft, tremulous beauty to take possession of his soul, old memories to steal over his heart. He leaned back in his arm-chair, folded his arms over his breast and fell into a kind of trance. Gradually, as his senses lost their hold upon the visible, the snow-laden pines, the white peaks, the swollen torrents passed away from his gaze, till at last it seemed that the sternness of winter had passed away—spring, life, green beauty took its place.

The four walls of his chalet fell; he was sitting on the green sward, innumerable delicious odors filled the air with fragrance, bright-eyed flowers were about him, the birds twittered gayly, everywhere was life and gladness; but in the midst of all was a something incongruous, like a minor chord in a fair melody—a sound of low, sad singing, the voice as of one in pain. Maurice thought he knew the voice; turning suddenly, he saw his wife. She was walking steadily forward with a gliding step; a black robe covered her from head to foot; her eyes were fixed on the distant horizon. He thought that he called her "Margaret!" but her eyes did not move, only her lips stirred as if in prayer. She glided past him, but before she had quite gone out of his reach he caught the hem of her dress. Then, while her heaven-turned face was slowly moving, while he was yearning to catch the gleam of her eyes, the vision passed, as visions will.

The whole had only lasted a few minutes, though it seemed to Maurice as if he had been long insensible. When reality and consciousness began slowly to assert their cold superiority it was absolute pain. At first he tried to deny them, in the vain hope that closed eyes and utter stillness would bring back the fair vision; then suddenly the vague uneasiness a watchful presence brings awoke him fully.

He started up, and saw by the failing light that he was not alone—he was being watched. Between him and the window a dark form was standing; keen, searching eyes scanned his face; they were those of his enemy. L'Estrange had found his way to the chalet. At last these two were face to face.

It was a rude awakening from a pleasant dream, and the very contrast between the fairness of the vision and the blackness of that reality which to Maurice's inflamed heart this man personified made his hatred more intense. It took him but a moment to start to his feet. His first impulse was to seize the intruder by the throat and cast him out; his very presence seemed a wanton insult. But L'Estrange met his gaze calmly, and Maurice checked himself: "Before I touch him I will get to the bottom of the mystery, and if he have betrayed her as well as me—"

He clenched his teeth and involuntarily smote his knotted fists together. For a few moments the men looked at one another in silence. Maurice spoke first, and his voice was like the growl of an angry lion: "What has brought you here?"

A sneer curled the Frenchman's lips: "No love to you, Mr. Grey, but—listen to me patiently, or I vow I will be silent for ever—a late repentance for an old wrong."

"*Then—*" There was a whole torrent of wrath pent up in the opening syllable.

"I tell you not to speak," cried his visitor, "or what I have come to say shall never be told. Maurice Grey, you are my enemy. You married the only woman I ever loved. This I could have forgiven; it was my fault, it was in the course of Nature; but you won her heart, the heart that once was mine. Yes, short-sighted Englishman, of this I can speak, for you knew it; she told you, and this it was that filled you with proud jealousy, that made you torment yourself. Yet it is true your wife loved you as she never loved me. I did not believe it then: now I know it. You gasp: well you may. That was my snare, and you fell into it. I see the letter; give it to me. Is it true, then, that with all your boasted knowledge of the world you could not read jealousy and spite under these fine phrases, made for me by a lying English servant? But yours is a strange nation. Clever and far-seeing where your money is in question, you are in knowledge of character, in all that touches your affections, easy to take in as little children. You frown impatiently. I shall soon have done. I tell you, Monsieur Grey, the meeting you interrupted that day was the first and only one that had taken place between your wife and me since your marriage. And the attitude in which you found me? Mon Dieu! nothing simpler—got up for you—*un tableau vivant motivé.* She was more surprised than you, la pauvrette!" His voice sank. "Since that day four long years have passed by. I have spent them in seeking her—persecuting her, if you like; so it was, so it must be. Her hatred is strong and bitter. I deserve it for misunderstanding her. But women have been my study all my life, and I never met *her* like before. *You* had less cause. What do you deserve? But do not answer me yet. Never fear, proud Englishman; your reckoning shall come by and by; my task must first be finished. She hid herself from me for a long time, but at last I came upon her in a miserable London lodging. The sight of me shocked and terrified her. She left London at once, and returned to the lonely place where she had lived in the closest retirement since your desertion. But, woman-like, she had left her address behind her. I found it out, followed her, forced myself upon her; and then at last, then first, I understood her. It was in the midst of deep loneliness—a loneliness which I saw by her face was killing her—that I found her out. She had one joy and consolation, a little daughter whom she had trained to love *you*, to wait and watch for your return. I spoke to her that day, but she repelled me with scorn and abhorrence

Maurice Grey, I offer for myself no excuse. I was mad with rage and pain. I determined to punish her. I stole her little one, and in such a way that she might think it had been done by you."

The Englishman could bear it no longer. He sprang forward, and seizing his enemy by the collar shook him vigorously:

"Villain! do you know what you deserve?"

"Patience!" replied the man when he had wrenched himself free from that strong grasp. "You shall have my life. Mon Dieu! it is worth little. But first you must listen to me."

He retreated to the side of the little window, the evening light shone full on his face. He fixed his enemy with his piercing eyes, to which the fever of his brain had given strange brilliancy. "You want to know what brought me here," he continued. "I have told you—no love to you, albeit my hand and voice may restore you to life and happiness—to all life holds most precious and dear. And yet it is love as well as penitence that has brought me to this. Love—a truer love than I have ever known—to the woman and child whom you have forsaken; for your little daughter changed my mood. I dare not speak of *her*. It would make me soft when I should be stern. She has been with me ever since; she is with me now. See her for yourself. She is a living proof of what I tell." The man bowed his head. "I give her up to you. I have found you for this, that you may take my treasure. And now—for I read the fierce hunger of your eyes; you Englishmen are all alike, insatiate, uncontrolled—*la revanche.* Well! it is well. Monsieur Grey, I understand your nature, and my hand shall supply you with an instrument. I went into your room to-day. I found these; I have brought them with me."

He took from a chair on which he had laid them the pair of pistols, one of which Maurice had loaded and prepared for action only a few days before.

The sight inflamed him. It recalled to his mind what this man had done—how for these long years his life had been a blank of good—a burden from which he had even sought to free himself. He seized the offered case. "Yes," he said sternly, "it is well. Villain, it were a good deed to rid the world of such as you."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. "Soit donc," he said calmly; then folded his arms with the equanimity of a red Indian, who looks death and all its horrors in the face without shrinking.

It was too much for Maurice Grey's patience. He drew near to his enemy and shook him roughly: "Do you take me for an assassin? Come out, if you have any of the feelings of a man left in you, and defend yourself," he said hoarsely, and led the way to the door.

L'Estrange followed with a calmness that was no longer real, for his nervous system had given way suddenly. The tension that had supported him through these long weeks of wandering, the iron purpose, the self-constraining force, had given way suddenly when the necessity had gone by, when his tale had been told, when he had read in his enemy's face that it was counted true.

For this time Maurice could not help himself. Perhaps even in his passionate longing for this, a restored belief in the truth and purity of her who had once been to him the embodiment of all that was best and fairest in womanhood, had kept him incredulous through Arthur's tale. This strange confirmation of its every detail, wrung out from the very torture of his enemy's heart, commended itself to him as true.

He disbelieved her no longer. Rather, his soul was overflowing with passionate repentance and pity—repentance for the cruel blow he had dealt her, pity for those years of loneliness, anguish for his own mistakes, for a past that would ever remain the past, that no future, however blessed, could recall. All this was surging in his brain as he listened to those few but fate-laden words, and the first impulse was indignation against her betrayer. He could not detach his past from his present; out of his own mouth he was condemned. Persecutor, villain, torturer of weak women and helpless children (for Maurice had not seen his child; how could he tell that *she* had not suffered ill-treatment at his hands?), he should die the death of a dog, be cast out into the frozen valleys to sleep the sleep of bitter ignominy.

It may be that in the glance cast at him by his enemy when he had seized him, when his pale face was close to his own, L'Estrange had read this wild determination, for as he followed his guide his knees trembled. He was no more the accuser, but the accused, the condemned.

Margaret was avenged. With head cast down and failing heart he followed his stern guide, while still the fitful twilight, reflected from the dazzling snow, shone cold and calm over the hills. The stricken man groaned in spirit. "It is the bitterness of death," he said to himself. "Mon Dieu! I am punished. I would have seen la petite. She will grieve for me."

His thoughts were broken in upon suddenly; they had reached the border of a deep ravine, and Maurice stopped. He looked round: "The light is uncertain, but we shall have the same chance. Whoever falls, falls there."

He pointed down to the abyss, fathomless in the dim evening light.

"We have no seconds—allow me to arrange everything."

He took out the pistols, examined their priming with minute care, and handed one to L'Estrange.

"I will give the word," he said; "we fire together."

With steady, measured tread he paced the distance that was to divide them, then took his place by the ravine, pale, calm, determined—the avenger.

Maurice Grey did not suppose for a moment that *he* would fall, though, a true Englishman, he would give his enemy a fair chance for life. Evil as he believed this man to be, deserving death for the traitorous wrong he had consummated, he would yet give him the power of defending himself. But as this man of iron nerve counted out unfalteringly the seconds that divided one of them from death, he showed his belief in the issue by the defiance he shouted out across the shadows: "But yesterday I would have taken my own life, and with this very weapon; now I take yours. Traitor, coward, slanderer of the innocent, prepare for death!"

Was it the knell of fate? No answer came from the condemned man, but before the fatal ball could cleave the air, before the word that might have meant death to one of them had been spoken, he staggered strangely, gave utterance to a gurgling cry and fell forward to the ground.

CHAPTER V.

ES IST NUR EIN KINDLEIN—ONLY A CHILD.

> What wert thou then? A child most infantine,
> Yet wandering far beyond that innocent age
> In all but its sweet looks and mien divine?

Lights were glittering in the hotel at Grindelwald—something more than the paltry allowance of which Arthur had feelingly complained was being displayed, for, late as it was in the season, there had been arrivals, and the landlord's heart was light.

He could not understand this fancy of people for keen winds, frost and snow, but it suited his purpose and he rejoiced. The dull season would be rendered shorter, and his winter expenses proportionately lightened. In the fulness of his heart he made a great display in the way of illumination, lighted the large stove in the small saloon, and did all he could to make his friends forget the dreariness and desolation that reigned outside.

For the evening that had fallen with a certain calm, autumnal beauty had deepened into a blustering, stormy night. The wind whistled among the hills, the loose snow-drifts were driven blindingly hither and thither; it would not have been a pleasant night to face. Decidedly, the fireside, or, as at Grindelwald, the stove-corner, was the most comfortable resting-place. And so the new arrivals, two young Englishmen and a German (the very same, by the bye, who had annoyed Arthur by his vigorous "wunderschons" and his dutiful "enthousiasmus" in the course of their journey across the St. Gothard), appeared to think.

As the household was principally composed of men, sundry indulgences were permitted, and unchecked they discussed their cigars and drank their "lager bier" in the saloon, gathered together in a close circle by the stove, their feet filling up by turns its narrow opening. But apparently every one in the hotel was not of the same mind. Several times in the course of one short hour the Englishmen were driven to in dulge in strong language, and the German to splutter and fume, by the inroad of a blast of chill air.

The hotel had not been constructed in such a way as to exclude draughts, and whenever the outer door was opened the cold air sweeping up the passages made itself felt in the saloon.

"Donner wetter!" said the German at last as the blast of cold air came in a continued stream, "I must find out all about zis. What can, zen, be ze meaning of it?"

"Some one out in the snow," suggested a mild young man with auburn hair and pale whiskers.

"But, my good friend, why not bring him in?" asked the puzzled German.

"Lost, pewhaps," replied the young man, puffing calmly.

"Lost, lost! but what may zat have to do wid ze door?"

"Anxious fwiends," replied the Englishman calmly—"excitable foweigners, I should say."

The German looked at him in a helpless way, scarcely certain whether, as a unit in that generic body known by the English under the name of foreigners, he ought to take notice of the implied slight. His indecision ended in a walk to the door of the room. It was clearly useless to regard the eccentricities of those proud islanders, he said to himself. If they *would* persist in looking down on other and worthier nationalities, why so they might; they would find out their mistake some day. So absorbed was the German in his mental soliloquy that in passing out from the room he left the unhappy door open, and curses not loud but deep followed him from the proud islander he had left behind. The German found out in the mean time that his sensitive nature had not betrayed him. That the outer door was open became evident to him at once by the blast of keen air which swept up the dimly-lit passage.

Two figures were standing in the doorway, faintly shown by the light of the little oil-lamp that hung over the entrance. One was a fair-haired child, wrapped from head to foot in a scarlet cloak, the other was the landlord of the hotel.

He was stooping over the child, his face very red in the extremity of his effort to make her understand that it was impossible for her to go out in the snow.

"Mademoiselle—not go—snow cold—mademoiselle be wander—-lose—nicht finden—" he was saying spasmodically, holding the door shut, while she, with her small strength, was struggling to open it.

"But—we can no permit—" he began more fluently.

The child interrupted him with tears and sobs: "Please let me only see if they are coming. Mon père said he would come back to-night. He is lost. I thought yesterday he was going to die. Oh, please, I know the way he went. It's not very dark. I can always make him better."

The landlord was in despair. He wanted the assistance of some interpreter, and yet he was afraid to leave the child, lest she should give him the slip and run out into the snow.

The appearance of the German was a great relief, for this young man had not been accustomed to hide his light under a bushel. Wherever he went he exhibited his knowledge of English. Already that day the landlord had been astonished by his fluency in this most intricate and embarrassing tongue.

In a few words he described the situation to the new-comer. The German immediately addressed himself to the weeping child: "Your *papa* is out in ze snow, my leetle maid."

The child's tears stopped; she raised her dark eyes pleadingly to his face: "Not my papa—mon père. Oh, please take me to find him."

This was rather embarrassing. The compassionate German looked out into the snowy night: "Wid all my heart I would help you, liebe fräulein, but you will no doubt perceive I know none of ze paths, and you—" He looked down at the tiny figure.

Almost unconsciously these two men had been answering that strange womanliness in the little face by treating this child as if she had been three times her age.

The German smiled and looked at the landlord: "Es ist nur ein kindlein." Then to Laura, with an assumption of sternness, "Leetle maids are sometimes weelful. Zey should understand zat ze elders know best. Come now wid me to ze fire."

He put out his hand to lead her, but Laura shrank back, her eyes growing large with fear. She did not understand being so treated by a stranger. It made her long all the more for her friend's protecting tenderness. She rejected the hand held out to her with all the dignity of one double her age: then suddenly her child-heart failed. She threw herself on her knees on the cold stones, pressed her forehead against the door and wailed out her childish plaint: "Mon père! mon père! come back to Laura."

The landlord shook his head helplessly, but the young German, who had always prided himself on a certain determination of character, looked stern. "Dis ees all folly," he said; "as I said just now, leetle maids must not be weelful. Komme mit, mademoiselle; or, as I should say, come wid me, mees."

He stooped to the little figure, all huddled together on the stones, and tried to raise it in his arms, but with sudden agility the child escaped him. She stopped crying and stood upright against the wall of the passage, facing her tormentor, her eyes and cheeks on flame.

"Go!" she cried, stamping her little foot. "Why do you speak to me? why do you touch me?"

And in spite of his boasted determination the German stood back abashed.

Proceedings were at this stage—the landlord helpless, the German doubtful about the next step that ought to be taken in the task of subduing this child, who partook so early of that proud island-nature which had already called for his reprobation, and Laura looking up at them both with more than a child's determination in her small face—when another actor appeared upon the scene.

Arthur had been sitting during all that afternoon alone in his room, thinking over the occurrences of the past days—now hoping, now despairing, as he reviewed in all its minutest details the interview of that day. He was torturing himself by recalling the eloquent words he had intended to use, but had not—the conclusive reasons he might have brought forward had he only remembered them at the right time—when there came to his ears the sound of a child's cry.

The voice was strangely familiar; at first he could not recall why it was so, for the memory of his humiliating defeat at Moscow had been swamped by the succession of exciting events that had followed it.

Curiosity led him to investigate the matter. He went down stairs, and the first sight of the little flushed face told its tale. This was Margaret's child. The second prize he had been seeking was actually within his grasp, and in his first excitement Arthur felt inclined to seize the child and carry her off whether she would or not. But experience, the two failures that preceded this most unlooked-for meeting, had taught him caution. This time he would not attempt to coerce the strange little being whom Fate had thrown in his way, but it was quite possible that he might win her over to confidence. Acting on this determination, he stood back in the shadow and bided his time.

The German was half ashamed of his irresolution. "Leetle maids must be sensible," Arthur heard him say, and as he spoke he tried once more to raise the child in his arms.

Laura gave a little frightened cry and turned hastily to run up the staircase, but only to find her way blocked by one she looked upon as another enemy. For even by that uncertain light she recognized in Arthur the man who had made an attempt upon her liberty at Moscow. But this time the child was desperate. She stood and faced him like a wild animal at bay.

"Let me pass, let me pass!" she cried.

He did not attempt to touch her, but, standing aside on the staircase, looked at her with kind, gentle eyes. "What is it, dear? is any one hurting you?" he asked.

The child looked up into the frank, boyish face and trusted him. "Perhaps you can help Laura," she said; "but—"

"I was foolish the other day," he said quietly; "I did not quite understand; you must forgive me."

"You wanted to take me away from mon père, and now"—the child burst into tears—"mon père is lost. Please, please take me to find him!"

"Come up stairs and tell me all about it, Laura. I will help you if I possibly can."

Then to the German, who was gazing at him open-mouthed, "Sir, this is the child of one of my dearest friends; I take her under my protection."

"As you like," replied he, and shrugged his shoulders. "Ze young man is offended," he muttered, "because I did not treat ze bébé like one great princess."

He returned to the stove, while Arthur drew from Laura all he desired to know. She had come there with "mon père," as she always called L'Estrange. They were looking for papa. Early that day he had told her that he knew where her father was—that he would go away alone, and return in the evening to let her know if her father had been found. He was not very far away, he had said, and the little Laura had been waiting and watching all the evening. The evening had deepened into night, and still her friend had not come back. He must be lost.

This was the burden of her simple tale. It made Arthur think. What could be the meaning of this? Had a sudden repentance seized this man? Had he really determined to find Maurice Grey and tell him the actual truth about his deserted wife? Or could any other motive have moved him to seek his enemy? No, no; human wickedness could not surely go so far. With this man's child in his grasp, this child, whose pure affection he had undoubtedly won, it was not possible; and yet if the enemies had met alone, face to face, in the great solitude— The young man shuddered.

"Laura," he said, turning to the little one, "I must find them at once."

The child clung about his knees: "Oh, take me with you! Please, please take me! I can make mon père well when no one else can—he says so."

Arthur did not answer at first. He was thinking. He rang the bell and made inquiries about a guide, for it would have been dangerous on such a night to have made the attempt alone. He ascertained that it would be possible to obtain one with very little delay.

The distance which separated them from the chalet was not great. They would be two men. The child might easily be carried between them, and it was more than probable that her presence would do more than anything else to allay the fever-heat of the two men, one of whom must love her instinctively, while the other evidently loved her deeply already. The only fear—and it shot through Arthur's heart like a pain—was that they might be too late—that already in the fierce anger of that moment, in the awful solitude one of these two might have taken the life of the other.

"If I had only known, if I could only have guessed, I should never have left him," he said to himself.

But Laura was still looking up at him anxiously. He answered her with a smile: "If you will wrap yourself up well, little one, and submit to be carried."

"Yes, yes," answered the child joyfully; "mon père carries me sometimes; but"—she stopped, and there came a cloud over her face—"I will tire you; I am heavy."

She was answered by a knock at the door. There appeared on the threshold the burly figure of one of the true sons of the soil. He was accustomed to much heavier burdens than the little Laura, wraps and all. The honest Swiss was at a loss to understand why this little maiden should go with them on such a search, but he did not express his feelings in any way. He lifted her as lightly as if she had been a bird, placed her on his shoulder, and in a few moments the hotel, the astonished landlord, the hurt German and the glimmering village-lights were left in the distance.

The little party—the two men and the child—were threading the dark, lonely mountain-path that led to the chalet.

It was a strange experience for a child like Laura, but happily for herself she did not understand its strangeness. All she knew was that her wish was being accomplished—that, guided and befriended, she was hastening through the night to find her two fathers.

Blessed is the faith of earth's little ones!

I wonder if the reason for it is that "in heaven their angels do always behold the face of the Father"?

CHAPTER VI.

HADST THOU THE SECOND SIGHT?

Digging thine heart and throwing
  Away its childhood's gold,
  That so its woman-depth might hold
His spirit's overflowing?
(For surging souls no worlds can bound
Their channel in the heart have found.)

Arthur would not allow his guide to do all the work. He wanted to know this strange child—Margaret's child; he wanted to try and understand what was this power, savoring to his mind of dark magic, that her mother's enemy had gained over her. After they had walked in total silence for about half an hour he insisted on a change.

Laura wished to walk, but upon Arthur pointing out to her that her small feet would be swamped in the snow, she submitted again. She was very grateful to this new ally for his prompt carrying out of her wishes, and with that strange woman-insight which belonged so peculiarly to this child she read in the face of her new guide that in submitting to his wishes she could best show her gratitude.

In Arthur's manner to her there was something of the reverent devotion that had been one means of drawing her heart so completely to the friend she was seeking in the desolate Alpine solitudes. The German had insulted Laura by treating her like a little child, for her late experiences had drawn her on, not from the sweet simplicity of childhood—for in this had consisted her power over the wild heart of L'Estrange—but from many of its feelings; Laura had become sensitive beyond her years, and this under the circumstances was scarcely wonderful. She had shared, and probably understood, her mother's sorrows; she had lived for her sake a life too intense for one of her tender years; she had taken a part in struggles of whose existence she ought to have known nothing; she had thought and dreamed and reasoned till the woman-nature that lies hidden in the heart of every girl-child had become unhealthily developed. Her childhood, in this sense, had passed by; Laura would never return to the gay carelessness of early youth.

Gravely she allowed Arthur to gather her up into his arms, and as, in their momentary stoppage, the light of the guide's lantern shone upon her pale fair face and deep earnest eyes, the young man wondered. He wondered at her unchildlike beauty—he wondered at his own instinctive reverence.

"Are you quite comfortable, Laura?" he inquired as he drew her cloak over her tiny feet.

"Quite, thank you," replied the child; "and you are very kind. Mon père will thank you; but oh, I wonder shall we find him soon?"

"Do you know that we are going to find some one else, Laura?" asked Arthur, rather shocked to find her head so full of her false father that she had no thoughts to spare for her true one.

"Yes, I know," she answered gravely; "and sometimes I'm sorry that I can't love my own papa so much as mon père; but, you see, I've never seen him: at least, mamma says I have; I don't remember at all." She paused a moment, then added in a grieved, puzzled tone, "Oh, *please* tell me—for I want so much to know—*ought* I to love my own papa as well as mamma and mon père?" The question had evidently been tormenting her.

"You *ought* to put such ideas out of your little head," said Arthur lightly.

"But I *can't*," replied the child in a grieved tone; and Arthur, quite perplexed, tried a new set of tactics:

"What makes you love this person so much whom you call mon père?"

"What *makes* me?" Unconsciously Arthur had started another bewildering question. She raised her head and knit her small brows: "It's not because he's good to me, for other people have been good to me, and I didn't love them. You know loving and liking are different. Mamma told me I ought to love my papa, but you see there isn't any *ought* in love, and I must love mon père best. Oh, I wonder why!"

This was certainly a strange child. Arthur had not laid his hand upon the magic; her answer only made it appear the more mysterious. He put another leading question: "Is he very good to you, Laura?"

"Mon père, do you mean? Oh, he is so good! I want him to come back with me to mamma, but when I talk about it he looks at me in that sad way, like people do when they are going to say good-bye. Do you *think* I shall be able to get him to say he will come? Oh"—the child's face brightened, a happy thought seemed to have struck her—"will *you* ask him to come? Perhaps he will do it for you." She went on rapidly, for the child-nature was beginning to assert itself: "He left a great big dog in the village—big enough to carry me on its back, mon père says. And just fancy! it's to be all mine. I wonder how long we shall be getting back to mamma, and *won't* she be pleased?" For at the thought of the great dog, the sea, the village and mamma the painful questioning had passed away from Laura's mind. She was the child again—her mother's darling—the tender little one whom Margaret loved.

Arthur's throat contracted strangely as he listened. It was such a contrast. The night, the darkness, the desolation around them, the horror that might only too possibly be before them, and the child's innocent dreams, her unconsciousness of evil, her calm certainty of hope. The idea made him press forward almost fiercely for a few moments, but his stolid guide called him back to reason. The torch-bearer would not hasten; he went forward with quiet, plodding step, and to distance him would have been in the highest degree dangerous.

Laura's question remained unanswered, for Arthur had not L'Estrange's strength of muscle or iron nerve, and he was passing through a mental experience intense enough to draw away some of his physical force. His arms began to ache and his knees to tremble. He was obliged to give up Laura to the guide, and to stop one moment to gather up his strength for a new effort.

Laura was concerned. "I knew I was too heavy," she said.

But the young man answered with a smile, and again they plodded on in silence. Their task was not an easy one. In some places the ice had gathered in a thin frost-work over the snow, so that where they thought to find sure footing they sank to their knees in the soft, white mass; in others, the path intersecting a meadow was almost undiscoverable by reason of the white unity that did away with all known landmarks. But happily, their guide was a good one and the path was well trodden. He knew it thoroughly; then, before midnight had chimed from the village-clock the mists had partially risen, the wind had fallen, and the glamour of moonlight shone cold over the snow. By its light Arthur saw a thin wreath of blue smoke rising from beyond the pine wood they were nearing. He pointed it out to Laura, his heart almost standing still with the conflict of fear and hope that possessed him.

The child smiled up into his face. "Mon père is there," she said.

"Your *father* is there," was the answer sternly spoken, and the little one was checked. She said no more, but watched till the dark pines, looking weird and gaunt in the moonshine, rose high above their heads, shutting out that first glimpse of Maurice Grey's dwelling.

"I will go first," said Arthur; "I know the way."

He began to think he had been wrong in bringing the tender child. He feared the effect upon her mind of some terrible discovery, she was so utterly unprepared for the horror that had been in his mind during the latter part of that weary journey.

The chalet was on the outskirts of the wood, just where an Alpine meadow opened out. As Arthur drew near he looked up earnestly. No light shone from the little window. He trembled, but there was no time for delay; he knocked long and desperately, as one might do who had come on an errand of life and death.

Marie in her night-cap appeared at the window. Her face had a scared look; she shook her head and refused to let him in.

Arthur had forgotten, in his impatience to press on, that if those he sought should not be within, the old woman, obtuse at the best of times, might fail to recognize and refuse to admit him.

He was obliged to wait until his guide, a person well known to Marie, could come up with Laura. His decided summons brought out the old woman again; she obeyed her countryman, and opened the door after very little further delay.

They entered, and Arthur found that his fears had been only too well grounded. The chalet was empty. It was clear, further, from the excited signs made by the old woman as she told her story to the guide, that there had been some kind of quarrel, and that the enemies had gone out together.

Arthur wrung his hands. For the first time his heart failed him. Had Maurice been found only for this—either that his own life should fall a prey to his enemy, or that the stain of blood-guiltiness should rest for ever on his head?—for their departure, their long absence, the scared looks of the old woman, all pointed to one suspicion; the two men had left the solitary dwelling with no friendly motive actuating them. It was more than probable that a fierce conflict had taken place—that the meeting in the snows had been fatal to one, perhaps to both of them. And then—what then? He scarcely dared to think.

The old woman had lit Maurice's lamp in the interval. Its light shone upon the face of his child. She was gazing with lips parted, and eyes in which a certain instinct of some unknown horror was gleaming, into Arthur's face. She went up to him and touched his arm with her small hand. "Why does the old woman look at me like that?" she whispered, lifting up a pale, scared face. "And what have they done with mon père? He's not here." And she looked round inquiringly.

"I am afraid they have lost themselves in the snow," replied Arthur as calmly as he could. "Laura, we must leave you here and go out again to look for them."

"*Them?*" repeated she in a low tone. "Then my own papa is with him. But what's the matter? why do you all look so frightened? Is mon père dead? Oh, please, please, let me go to him!"

"Laura, you must be sensible. We cannot take you, my poor child! Stay here with Marie! Listen, dear! We may go into dangerous places; we may be lost."

But the child did not seem to hear him. There had come a strange, sudden look into her face, as though she could see more than others saw. She held up her hand. "Hush!"

she said in a tone that made Arthur shiver, it was so unchildlike in its earnestness; and even as she spoke that dawning consciousness of a certain mysterious horror paled her cheek and made her dark eyes large and deep. "Mon père is calling me," she said. "They are hurting him. Come, come!"

She rushed to the door, and opening it stood for a moment on the threshold, mute, in the attitude of deep attention, her hands plunged forward into the darkness, as though she were appealing to some unseen power, her golden hair thrown back from her uncovered head, her face peering out into the night.

Within, no one stirred. It almost seemed as if they were waiting for the development of a mysterious power in this strange child. And as they stood, silent, motionless, watchful, there came to their ears a sound. It was distinct from the moaning of the wind among the trees, distinct from the rush of the torrents, distinct from the rattle of the leafless pine-branches. The sound was a groan. It spoke as plainly as words of human anguish.

For a moment none of them stirred, and yet the sound had fallen on the ears of all, but this certainty of an unseen, nameless horror acted on them like a spell. It was only when the child started forward into the night that Arthur was aroused from the momentary inaction to a sense of the necessity for immediate exertion.

He rushed after Laura, caught hold of her, and for the second time gathered her up into his arms. "My child," he said hoarsely, "you *must* come back. God only knows what we may find out there! Be calm. We shall do our best to bring them to you." The child looked up at him; she never struggled when she knew all struggling would be useless, and there was wonder as well as a certain awe in her gaze.

"What do you mean?" she asked; "none of you understand. Mon père is ill, and papa is taking care of him; and it's cold out there in the snow, but he won't leave him. He wants us to help him."

"*Us!*" Involuntarily Arthur smiled as he held the tiny figure in his grasp.

"We can find them without you, Laura," he said. The guide had joined them with the lantern. "Go in, like a good child."

In her turn Laura smiled. "Which way will you go to find them?" she asked. "Listen to me: I know all about it. Just now, when I wanted to listen and you *would* talk, God showed it to me in a dream. Mon père is ill. He wants me—I'll take you to find him."

Marie stood at the door holding out her arms; the guide motioned peremptorily that the child should return to the chalet. Arthur stood irresolute. He felt half inclined to trust to the little one's instincts, and in the delay, while the precious moments that might mean life or death to one of the two men in the snow were passing, *that* sound came to their ears again—a heavy groan, drawn, it would seem, from a heart's agony.

It was more than Laura could bear, for she, and she alone of that little company, knew the sound; she had heard it before.

In his excitement Arthur's hold on her hand relaxed. With a sudden cry she wrenched herself free, and before the two men could seize her again her white dress and scarlet cloak made a blot on the moonlit snow far on in advance. What could they do but follow in her track? and when they had come up with her, when she had allowed herself once more to be caught, the light from the open door of the chalet gleamed far away in the distance. The wilful little maiden was perched once more on the shoulder of the stolid Swiss guide. She arrogated to herself the right of directing her companions, and it was well. Once, at least, from her tower of observation she scented danger and warned them away from the brink of a ravine. But the men had a surer guide than the dreams of a child. In a part of the meadow that was sheltered from the wind Arthur had found the traces of footsteps in the snow.

Strange to say, the discovery was made in the very direction which Laura had taken when she started on her wild flight. Had her loving instincts guided her, or was there really something supernatural in her knowledge?

Arthur asked himself this question repeatedly as he followed his guide in silence. He never found an answer. The events of that night were always wrapped in a partial mystery.

Was it so very unnatural? Who that has looked into the far-seeing eyes of some children, who that has carefully noted their strange ways, will be able to answer unhesitatingly that it was? They are nearer to heaven, nearer to the invisible, than those who have weathered a hundred storms, who have lost their faith in humanity, who have travelled for long years along the dusty highways of the world, tarnishing much of their soul's beauty, and forgetting too often the grandeur of their high destiny.

What wonder that the little ones sometimes see farther than we? for the invisible chord which binds their soul to heaven is, at their tender age, free for the passage to and fro of the angels, and it may be that they whisper to the children of the things that no eye can see. And the child is ready for these beautiful intuitions. It does not question—it believes.

CHAPTER VII.

FOR THE SECOND TIME SAVED FROM HIMSELF.

> Oh, unsay
> What thou hast said of man; nor deem me wrong.
> Mind cannot mind despise—it is itself.
> Mind must love mind.

The two men and the child pressed on. They had left the path behind them, they were winding between huge boulders, the débris from some devastating avalanche; like a mighty wall the mountains rose above them, hedging them in on the one side, while on the other was the continuation of the pine wood.

The guide had given up the lantern to Arthur; he could not manage both it and the child, and the young man, a few yards in advance, was seeking on hands and knees for further traces of footsteps in the snow.

The groans had not been repeated, and from this Arthur augured badly. It might be that the dying had passed into the dead. The young man's heart was sad. He had reckoned so entirely on the success of his enterprise, he had been so full of hope, and now it seemed as if the whole—all his hopes, all his efforts—was to be swamped in this sudden horror. For even if Maurice had escaped unhurt, even if the life of his enemy had fallen by his hand in his first horror at the discovery of that enemy's dark treachery, what would the result be on his own mind, on those of others?—to Margaret, who above all things had entreated that this man should be unharmed; to Laura, who loved him with all the strength of her young soul; to Maurice himself, who would feel when the deed was done that it was wrongly done, for this man had thrown himself, alone and helpless, into his hands, carrying as a peace-offering the act of expiation for his past wrongs, the confession of Margaret's spotless innocence. Arthur had gathered from Laura's words, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that this, and only this, had been the intention of L'Estrange in seeking an interview with Mr. Grey.

If he could only have foreseen all this, he said to himself mournfully, it might have been so different.

The voice of the child awoke him from his sad musing. It was very low, but in the stillness of that snowy night the slightest sound wrote its impress on the air. The earth itself seemed to be listening. "We're very near them now," she said; "I am sure we are. There, there! listen! The trees are shaking."

Almost instinctively the two men obeyed her imperative gestures. They rounded a great shoulder of rock. It led them on to a kind of plateau, studded here and there with stunted, snow-laden pines, ending abruptly in a depth of darkness, for what lay beyond the ravine that bounded it was hidden by the snow-vapors.

At first they saw nothing, but a certain feeling warned them to pause and look round attentively.

"Put me down," cried the child, and as if in answer to her call the branches of the pine that overhung the precipice crackled and stirred.

This excited Laura. She broke loose from the guide, and once more outstripping her companions rushed forward over the snow. A moment more, and her cry, partly of joy, partly of pain, drew Arthur to the spot. It was on the very brink of the ravine, under an overhanging pine tree, whose black shadow on the moonlit snow had prevented them from discovering what lay beneath it.

L'Estrange was outstretched there, silent, motionless, to all appearance dead. Laura was on her knees beside her friend, calling out to him piteously to open his eyes and speak to her. In her excitement the little one had not seen at first that there was another there—that the head of her friend was on the knees of a man who sat upright on the cold snow, his back resting against the stem of a pine tree. That man was her father—Maurice Grey.

Just before they came up he had fallen into that most dangerous of all states, a sleep among the snows—a dull, numb insensibility induced by the constrained posture, the long watching, the extreme cold. His child's wail aroused him. He opened his eyes, but his first thought was that he was dreaming, for as Arthur's lantern was turned slowly on the little group he saw in the golden hair from which the scarlet hood had fallen back, in the fair, delicately-chiselled face, in the dark, mournful eyes, so like his own, the little one he had deserted—Margaret's child. How had she come there? Gradually, as the film passed from his senses, he began to remember the events of the night, and the latter part of L'Estrange's strange confession flashed over his mind. While horror withheld Arthur from speaking, while the guide, whose movements were slower than his, was coming up to their assistance, a glimmering of the truth dawned upon Maurice's mind. *His* child had come out to seek this man, his enemy—*his* child was pouring out on her mother's betrayer the treasures of her young heart's affection. It smote him with a sudden pang.

But no answer came from the stricken man to the child's impassioned cries, and suddenly she raised her eyes. They met those of her father. She looked at him for a moment in silence, and involuntarily Maurice trembled. He was thinking of what might have been if the hand of God had not forestalled his.

In his first burst of anger against this man, the destroyer of his peace, the slanderer of her who was dearer to him than life, it had seemed no crime to avenge himself once and for ever of his enemy. But with the silence of that solemn night other thoughts had come. In the unlooked-for ending of their strife that evening God had rebuked him. "Vengeance is mine!" seemed to be crying in his ears. What was he, that he should arrogate to himself the functions that belong to the Divine? And say what one will, under any circumstances it is an awful thing—a thing that can never be forgotten or put away—to destroy human life.

Maurice Grey was neither weak nor sentimental, but that night as he hung over his enemy, tending as a brother might have done the man he had intended to destroy, he shuddered at the remembrance of what might have happened in the fever of his just indignation. And now, when the child—his child—looked up at him, her eyes large with fear for his enemy, asking him mutely for an account of this strangeness, Maurice was thankful that his answer might be no revelation of a tragedy that would have chilled her warm young blood and filled her with loathing of him—her father.

"Who has hurt mon père?" asked Laura.

"Little one," replied Maurice gravely, "he is ill; he will be better soon."

By this time Arthur was close beside them. He stumbled over something hard, stooped, and found a pistol at his feet.

"Don't touch it!" cried Maurice hastily; "it is loaded."

"Loaded!" repeated the young man slowly; "then—"

"Foolish boy!" replied Maurice with meaning. "I tell you this man was taken ill near my door. In the impossibility of getting assistance to move him, I have been watching him ever since his first seizure; but, for Goodness' sake, don't stand looking at us, or we shall die of cold out here! Get your burly friend to help you, and between you perhaps you may be able to carry this man as far as the chalet. As for myself, I am so cramped and numb that it will be all I can do to creep."

Maurice spoke cheerfully. It was as if a great load had suddenly been lifted from his soul.

Margaret pure, his hands free from blood-guiltiness, his little daughter within his grasp! It was like the opening of heaven to a spirit long tormented in the purifying fires.

Laura looked up triumphantly as she heard her father's words. "Didn't I say so?" she cried; "mon père was ill, and my own papa was taking care of him?" She stooped over L'Estrange: "Mon père, pauvre, cher père!" Then to Arthur and the guide: "Oh, please, lift him very gently. We must put him beside the fire. It will make mon père better."

She made an effort to raise his head on her small arm. And at her touch L'Estrange opened his eyes. "Ma fillette!" he whispered. Laura was satisfied.

"I have done him good already," she said, looking round at Arthur; "I said I could."

It was only when she had seen her friend raised, the burly Swiss supporting his head and shoulders, Arthur his feet, that she had eyes or words for Maurice. He rose with difficulty, the little one standing beside him and offering her small hand by way of assistance.

"Have you nothing to say to me, Laura?" he asked rather sadly as he walked, painfully at first, after Arthur and the guide, the little one trotting joyfully through the snow by his side.

She looked up at him: "You *are* my own papa?"

"Yes, Laura."

"And you are coming back home with us?""

"Yes."

"And you really want to see mamma again?"

"Yes."

"Then"—the child gave a deep sigh—"I am very glad."

That was the end of the first conversation between Laura and her father. They were obliged to look carefully to their footing, for two or three times the child had fallen upon the frozen snow. She did not seem to care much, but her father did; when at last the congealed blood began to flow through his veins, and his wonted vigor to return, Maurice Grey stooped and in his turn gathered her up into his arms.

Laura had found her true place at last. After her wanderings, her strange adventures, her fears and her dreams, she was able to lay her head on her father's breast. He was a stranger to the child. As yet her love for her false father was much stronger than any feeling for the true; but the consciousness perhaps of this, that he *was* her father, that her task was ended, her childish work accomplished, made a deep rest steal over her. With her arms round Maurice's neck and her head upon his shoulder the child fell fast asleep after her fatigues. It was childhood's sleep, dreamless and unbroken.

So Maurice brought her in to his house, solitary now no longer. He would not give her up into Marie's care, but taking the blankets from his bed, he arranged them with his pillows in a corner near the stove, and laid the little one down. There was a soft look in his face as he stooped over her. Where was all his cynicism? It had gone. He was thinking of Laura's mother, and reckoning how long the time might be before he could himself give back her child to her arms.

And in the mean time the cold dawn was beginning to creep over the snow. Maurice turned to his companions and held a council of war. They examined L'Estrange carefully, and found that one of his arms and part of his side were perfectly dead and helpless. He seemed to be partially paralyzed.

The question was, What should they do with him? In the solitude of Maurice's little chalet it would be impossible for him to obtain the necessary treatment, yet to move a man in his condition so far as the hotel would be a serious matter, and required more hands than they could muster.

They had improvised a kind of bed on the floor of the small sitting-room; they were standing round him, Maurice and Arthur talking earnestly, the guide only waiting for a sign to do anything that might be desired of him, when suddenly, to their astonishment, the man they had thought utterly insensible looked up and tried to raise himself. He fell back helpless. Then he opened his lips and tried to speak. Maurice stooped over him to catch the words, for his voice was thick and changed. "La fillette!" he murmured; "I saw her." Then, as Maurice pointed out the child fast asleep among the pillows: "It is well," he said quietly, and his head fell back again. He was thinking.

Gradually the events of the night were shaping themselves out of the mists which his long insensibility had thrown over his mind. "I remember," he said at last in a faint, low tone.

He beckoned to Arthur, who wondered at the recognition which he read in the face of the stricken man. But the dying have their privileges. Arthur overcame his repugnance and stooped down to listen to his words. "Tell me—" was all he said, pointing to the bed where Laura lay asleep.

The young man understood what he wanted. In as few words as possible he told of his discovery, of Laura's anxiety, of their midnight journey, and once or twice, as his tale went on, a tear rolled down L'Estrange's face, for in spirit as in body the man was overcome.

When it was ended he called Maurice to his side, and held out the only hand over which his will had any power, whispering as he did so, "Is it peace?"

Maurice took the hand and held it in his own. "Forgive me—" he began, but the man interrupted him with something of his old imperiousness.

"Young people," he said, "lie down—rest."

It was, after all, the most sensible suggestion. They gave him some brandy and hot water, which seemed to revive him; then, as utter weariness had taken possession of Arthur and the guide, they thought it best to obey, Maurice, who had piled fuel on the stove, declaring his intention of watching it and L'Estrange. But he too gave way before long, and the morning light streamed in upon the little chalet parlor, full of prostrate forms stretched out on the floor and wrapped in every kind of material.

Before the full morning light had aroused the weary men Laura had risen from her bed, and had knelt down by her friend to place one of the pillows her father had arranged for her under his head.

He was awake, and he opened his eyes with a smile, but the smile passed into a frown, and Laura feared she had offended him. The fact was, L'Estrange was steeling his heart and hers. He wanted to detach himself from his darling—to accustom himself to do without her—to teach her, if possible to care for him less.

But the little one put it down to pain, and tears filled her eyes "Mon père is worse," she murmured.

She remained by his side till the full light, breaking in upon the room, had aroused the sleepers.

Then another discussion took place. It was very strange. But the night before Maurice Grey would have thought it no sin to deprive his enemy of life. Another hand than his had smitten L'Estrange, and instead of deserting him, as he might have done, leaving him to find his death among the snows, Maurice Grey had risked his own life (for the numbness which had been creeping over him when his friends came up might soon have proved fatal) to watch over his. Perhaps the reason might be found in his helplessness. On the previous evening he had stood before Maurice as an accuser and a judge, arraigning him for the folly and short-sightedness which, according to his showing, had been far more instrumental than anything else in bringing about his suffering and Margaret's. And his biting words had found their echo in Maurice's own heart, being gifted with a double sting. In the man's attitude there had been a certain power, and this it was that had inflamed his opponent, till he had longed with a fierce, sudden passion of hatred to punish him to the uttermost.

For the second time Maurice Grey had been saved from himself, and now, as the man he had hated lay helpless at his feet—the brain that had conceived and the hand that had written that cruel letter torpid, the tongue which had given forth its biting irony silent—all his feelings changed. The helplessness of the strong man recommended him to his compassion; the remembrance of the service he had rendered him, the consciousness of his penitence for the wrong he had committed, softened Maurice toward him. He saw, for the first time, in L'Estrange's strange conduct the return to itself of a soul that had wandered from his own nobility. Bowing his head, the man who had been known as a bitter cynic confessed his wrong to humanity, his distrust of God. Maurice Grey was a changed man. He felt it in the lightness of heart with which he rose that morning; for, say what we will, it cannot but be that this hatred of their kind on which some men pride themselves is a bad and heart-degrading thing. It recoils upon itself. A man cannot despise his own nature and be happy. Maurice during these wretched years had been heaping up misery to himself. But it was over, once and for ever. In Margaret's faithful devotion and forgiving love, in his enemy's return to a better mind, in his child's simplicity, in Arthur's high-hearted chivalry, Maurice saw the other side of the picture he had so long been contemplating.

In the course of his life of wandering he had been pleasing himself by drawing out and marking the weaknesses of his fellows, and he had not found his task difficult; but now in his God-given nature, the nature he had despised, he began to see there was something underlying all these superficialities. For humanity had shown itself to him in its beauty—the beauty which made God Himself pronounce it good on that creation-dawn when "the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Maurice Grey thanked God and took courage. The discussion between himself and Arthur (for the guide was a silent assistant) resulted in very little.

Something in the way of a litter would be necessary to take the sufferer over the hills, and at least four strong men who could relieve one another. They were only three, and it seemed perfectly impossible to construct a litter out of the materials at hand.

The best plan seemed to be for the guide to return to the hotel and bring back with him men and litter, also provisions of some kind, for Marie's black bread and sausages had been so seriously besieged by her numerous invaders that very little, even of this uninviting food, was to be found in the small kitchen upon which Arthur made a raid. There was fortunately enough coffee to supply them each with a strong cup, only it had to be taken with goat's milk that had been standing for some days in Marie's pans.

Arthur and Laura, the two most fastidious of the little party, made many a wry face over the poor fare. These two had become fast friends; indeed, the child was in a fair way to be spoilt. She reigned like a queen among these men, so strangely met together in the solitary's dwelling. The general devotion did not much impress her. Most of her thoughts were given to one, and he seemed to take very little notice of his darling. Once or twice the tears filled Laura's eyes as she noticed how he would refuse what nourishment he could take when she offered it, and then receive it from another hand. It gave the young heart, premature in its development, a bitter pang to feel that the affection of this friend might possibly cease. But of all this the child said nothing. Breakfast—if breakfast it might be called—was over, the guide was about to start for Grindelwald, Arthur was busying himself about domestic matters, trying by his rapid movements to quicken the perceptions of old Marie, who had been rendered even more stupid than usual by the strange events of the night; Maurice sat by the side of his stricken guest, with his little daughter on his knees, when over the snow outside there came the sound of voices.

Laura ran to the window. "Four men," she cried, "and a mule, and one of those chairs to carry people, and rugs, and a big bundle, and— Oh, I hope there's some white bread; but perhaps they're not going to stop here."

She appealed to Arthur, the person with whom she felt most on terms of equality: "*Do* go out and see if they'd give us just one little bit."

Her summons drew the whole of the little party to the door, just in time to see the small cavalcade draw up, and to meet the questioning, reproachful gaze of the good Karl.

To explain his appearance on the scene, it will be necessary to relate how the ungrateful Arthur had quite forgotten his friend's servant, who according to his own showing had earned for him the favor of that tête-à-tête dinner at the hotel with the man to find whom he had traversed Europe in its length and breadth.

It was only when the good German showed his round face, in which sentiment and joy were struggling for the mastery, at the door of the chalet that Arthur remembered his intention of letting him know of his own return to the hotel and his master's whereabouts. The rapid start with Laura and the guide, following on the interval of regretful meditation in his own room, had put everything else out of his mind, and Karl, who, as was his wont, had been making himself useful and entertaining in the kitchen of the hotel, only found out when it was too late to do any good that uneasy rumors were afloat in the house about the two Englishmen, one of whom was his master.

Karl was eminently practical. He lost no time in dreaming about their probable fate. Something—perhaps an accident to his master, since the younger man had returned for assistance—was detaining them at the chalet. The chalet was ill-provided with food and necessary comforts. As soon as it could be possible to gather together a company large enough to be useful in any emergency, he would find his way to his master.

He spent the rest of the night in making every arrangement. Before dawn he and his party of three stalwart men were on foot. Hence their arrival at a comparatively early hour of the morning.

Karl's astonishment at the appearance presented by the chalet was very great, and it was blended with reproach. His master and his master's friend were on their feet, apparently uninjured; they seemed to have plenty of assistants, for the guide, Marie, Arthur, Maurice and the child made an imposing show in the small doorway; it was impossible to tell how many more might be behind them. Why, then, had he, the Englishman's faithful servant, been forgotten in this strange jubilee?

But his helpful nature reasserted itself when he found how very much his services were needed. In the course of a few minutes he was bustling about, acting as interpreter, preparing a substantial meal for Maurice's half-starved little company, presenting everybody with shawl or rug, and making himself generally useful.

Laura had her white bread and some sugar and milk. Arthur and Maurice rejoiced in the dissection of a fowl, and the guide had a fresh and unlimited supply of sausages; they were therefore soon sufficiently strengthened to think with equanimity of a new start. The poles of the *chaise-à-porteur*, brought up in case of emergency by the provident Karl, formed, with mattresses and ropes, an excellent litter. On this they laid L'Estrange, well wrapped up in rugs and blankets.

Before the sun had risen very high in the heavens the little cavalcade was in motion—Laura mounted on the mule which her father led; L'Estrange, passive as an infant, in the litter they had prepared for him; the rest of the party on foot.

As they entered the pinewood, Maurice turned, and shading his eyes from the morning sun, took one last look at his temporary dwelling. It had been the home of his solitude, the mute witness of despair that had reached its climax in those last days when his life had seemed a burden too heavy to be borne, and he was leaving it—leaving it and the past life for ever.

His pride had been rebuked, his self-reliance had fallen. But a few months before he had thought himself sufficient to himself: *that* madness had gone; human interests had already begun to throw their sweet influence around him; from the hermit's dwelling he was going out once more into the great world. It had done its work. The trial-time was over. He was stronger and better. His faith in God and humanity had returned. He could now look forward with hope—not, perhaps, the sanguineness of youth, which hopes simply because to despair would be impossible, but hope resting on a well-grounded confidence in himself, in humanity, in God.

Maurice Grey's after-life was not without its troubles, but through them all he never lost sight of the lessons learnt in his hermit life. Painfully gained, they were earnestly held.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PARTING.

Thou whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy soul's immensity;
Thou best philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage; thou eye among the blind:
Thou over whom thy immortality
Broods like the day, a master o'er a slave,
A presence which is not to be put by!

In the hotel they returned, for the moment, to their old arrangements. The faithful child would not forsake her friend; his illness had, if possible, only endeared him to her.

L'Estrange was better. The shock had only been very partial. On the day following that of his return to the hotel he was already able to speak intelligibly, and to understand everything that went on around him. It was the morning of that day. Laura had been busy about the room putting everything tidy, as she said in her childish way, for her father had sent his servant to say that he would pay them a visit. She noticed that the eyes of L'Estrange followed her painfully about the room. There was a trouble in his face the child did not quite understand. Except for his illness—which, childlike, Laura looked upon as something very transient—she could not see in their present circumstances any cause for sadness. Her mind was troubled with no doubts about the right course to pursue. They were all to go back to her mamma as soon as ever her friend could be moved. It had never crossed her gentle mind that he was to be shut out of their happiness, and, so far as she was concerned, she had no intention of leaving him.

The heart of the little child was light. Everything had come about as she had hoped.

But Laura, young as she was, had been too often in the presence of suffering not to recognize it, and her friend had taught her to observe. She read the sorrow in his face and went to his bedside: "Mon père, what is it? Are you worse?"

"Come to me, fillette," he answered, and with his left hand he drew her face to his.

The child smiled: "Pauvre cher père, why do you look so sorry? You ought to look glad, because we're all going back to mamma. Oh, I am so happy! That night, mon père, you remember, when you were out in the snow, and I thought you were lost, and I was to be left alone with people who said cross things, I wasn't happy then; but now it's all right. My papa is found—and," she lowered her voice as if speaking in confidence, "I think I shall love him too—then we shall see mamma again—"

She stopped suddenly, for the tears were falling one by one over her companion's face. To a stronger heart than Laura's the sight would have been pitiful. This stern, self-contained man did not often express his feelings. Even the child he loved had trembled sometimes as she looked at his dark, strong face—even she had feared to intrude upon his silence; now all was broken down. Weakness as of a little child had taken hold upon him. Laura was very much distressed

With tears of sympathy in her own eyes, she stroked the dark, passionate face, murmuring gentle words.

He spoke at last, and there was a sternness in his voice that might have repelled the child had she not known her friend so well. "Laura," he said, "you must not again say such things as these; you must try and understand, little one. What must be, must be; and thou and I *must* part. Hush! hush!"

For Laura's face was averted; she had hidden it in the bed-clothes; she was weeping in the silent, unchildlike way that once or twice before had moved L'Estrange so deeply. In his weakness the man had much difficulty in preventing himself from giving way once more and weeping with her, but he controlled himself, for he was determined that no one but himself should make her understand.

"Laura," he said very tenderly, laying his left hand on the soft, golden head he loved so well, "it is necessary—you must go. I am not worthy of this love, and your mother is waiting for you."

"But, mon père—" Laura lifted up her tear-stained face and met his deep, stern eyes. Her voice faltered, for, child as she was, she read his resolve. "You will be better," she said, "and come too."

"Never," he answered slowly. "Listen, little one." He put away the hair from her face and looked at her long and tenderly: "In years to come—ah, petite, long, long years—after your friend has been put away under the ground, ma fillette will be a woman, tall and beautiful and good; then she will know and understand that this thing is right; then she will know that her friend, who loved her, acted for the best in this—that what my Laura desires would not be possible. She must say to her old friend good-bye; she must go away to those who love her; not better—that could not be—but to those who have a greater right to her love. Why do you care for me, fillette? Ah, mon Dieu! it is painful," he added as if to himself, for the child's sobs had never ceased.

He drew her face down to him again: "Little bird, it is not well. These deep feelings give me grief. Thine is the age of laughter. Think then of la pauvre maman—she is weeping too."

"Yes," replied the child through her tears. "I want to go back; but oh"—a happy thought had struck her; she clasped her hands and looked up into her friend's face—"if papa and I go away now, at once, you'll get well and come afterward. This won't be saying good-bye for always: *please, please,* say it won't."

He felt inclined to give her an indefinite answer, to let her think that it should be as she wished; but when he looked into her dark, imploring eyes—the eyes from which shone out the tenderest, most innocent soul that had ever loved him in all his wild career—he felt that to deceive her would be impossible. He answered slowly and calmly, with the manner of one who for ever puts away some beautiful thing out of his sight: "Thou hast said it, fillette. Good-bye for always."

"Always! always!" The child repeated the word, her large dark eyes dilating as if with some hidden awe. "Mon père," she said almost in a whisper, "it is so long—always, for ever. Do you mean that I am *never, never* to see you again?"

He looked at her curiously. In his old way he was analyzing. He was trying to understand the sudden emotion that had blanched the little one's cheek and brought that look of awe into her eyes. It was not the first time that this vague terror of the unknowable had taken possession of this strange child's mind.

She shivered slightly as, standing by her friend's side, she reasoned out the matter with herself: "Mon père, what does it mean? To-day ends, and to-morrow will end; and this year and next year, and every year, I suppose, till we die; and then—after then—there is heaven and for ever—always, always, for ever. I *can't* understand it. Oh, mon père, is it true?" The child was in an agony. This was the mental torture that had, several times, racked her brain.

"And," she added under her breath, with the look and tone of one treble her age, "in all this for ever—so long, so long—I must not see mon père any more."

It was L'Estrange's turn to tremble. Rapidly as in a dream the remembrance came of that first day when for his own purpose he had implanted into the little one's mind thoughts and ideas too great and strong for one of her years.

"Mon Dieu!" murmured the stricken man, "and must it always be thus? I only love to blight and poison."

"Laura," he answered aloud—and his voice was grave and earnest—"you take things too much to heart. Try now to understand me, little one. Words have a certain meaning of their own, but people may give them too much meaning or too little. When ma fillette is older she will know that 'always may sometimes mean a day, a week, a year—sometimes indeed this for ever of which she speaks so earnestly, but *very, very* seldom. Look up, petite. *My* always is not at all so very terrible. All I mean is this: you must go back home with your own father, and leave your friend here. See! I have made a letter be written to Paris, to the person whom you will remember there. Marie will come and help me to move to her little house; then if ever ma fillette comes to Paris she will know where to hear of her old friend."

"Oh, please let me have it," cried the child. She took the letter from the hand of L'Estrange, sat down before the table, and copied the address, letter by letter, in her large childish handwriting, her friend spelling it over for her that there might be no mistake. Then she folded up the paper and clasped it in both hands. "Mon père," she said, "I will never lose it."

In the practical action Laura's dreamy fears had fled. Hope, the hope of a young child, reasserted itself once more. "I will show it to mamma," she said, "and we'll come together to see you; then perhaps—"

She was interrupted by a knock at the door. Her father was outside waiting for admittance.

As might have been expected, Maurice Grey had lost no time in making all needful preparation for their journey to England. He was in a fever of anxiety to be moving once more, to be on his way to his injured wife, to assure himself of her forgiveness and continued love. And there had been certain points in the story told by Arthur which had alarmed him. Margaret's poverty: the thought of this gave him perhaps the keenest pang he had experienced. He could not understand it, for, as has already been seen, Maurice Grey was not exactly to blame for this; but in his after review of all the circumstances he blamed himself bitterly for what he now looked upon as his own weak-minded folly in preserving this total silence. He had thought of his own pain in the event of all his fears receiving fatal confirmation, and his wife, so tenderly reared, had been suffering.

Then her delicacy, the sudden collapse of her powers. The thought of this was almost too hard to be borne, for if—if there should be disappointment before him—if he could never ask her forgiveness for the cruel wrong he had committed, never hold her again to his heart, never let her know how deeply through it all he had loved her—the man felt as if it would be better even to die himself. The bare idea maddened him.

He would willingly have cut through the air to reach her, and the necessary delay chafed his spirit. Since the moment of their return to the hotel the Englishman had been busy in making every preparation for departure.

Happily for him, the season had not yet entirely closed. Sledges would have to be used in various parts of the journey, and guides and drivers would probably require to be highly feed; but this was a matter of very small import. All he desired was speed. Arthur seconded his efforts ably. As the diligence had ceased running between Grindelwald and Interlachen, and the steamers no longer made their daily journey on the lake, a visit to Interlachen had been necessary, that special arrangements might be made as well for this as for their further journey; the railway connecting Thun with Berne had not then been completed.

It was arranged that Arthur should act as courier, preceding them to Thun to have relays prepared, and that Maurice should return to Grindelwald for Laura.

The child had not seen him since their journey through the snow from his solitary chalet in the mountains. She was a little shy of this new father, though inclined, as she had expressed herself to L'Estrange, to think that she should love him.

The fact was, that Laura, too much given to reason upon every point, could not quite reconcile to herself his love for her mother and his long absence. This had tormented the little one considerably during these last days. She took his caresses that morning very calmly. She would have run away then and left her father and friend alone together, but L'Estrange detained her. She obeyed his gesture and sat down again by his side.

Maurice drew her toward him. "Laura," he asked, "are you ready to come home?"

"Now?" said the child, "at once?"

"You want to go back to mamma, Laura?" he said gravely.

The child stood silent, trembling from head to foot. She was afraid to show what she felt before her father.

"Come," said Maurice, "we must thank your friend who has been so kind to you, and say good-bye to him."

Laura looked at L'Estrange. The proud face was turned to the wall. Weak as he was, he would yet show nothing before Maurice Grey. She went close up to his side. He motioned her away from him, and the heart of the little child could bear no longer. "Mon père will die if I go away," she cried piteously. She covered her face with her hands and began to cry. It was difficult for Maurice to know what to do. The child's tears made him feel perfectly helpless. He was not accustomed to little ones, and he felt inclined not only to wonder, but to feel rather angry, at the strange power this man, her mother's bitterest enemy, had gained over the child's mind.

He answered her with a man's impatience. Like others, he forgot for the moment, in her strange womanliness, that Laura was only a little child. "My dear Laura," he said sternly, "I must have no more of this. Leave off crying at once, and do as I tell you. Say good-bye to Mr. L'Estrange, find your cloak and hat and come with me. I have told the maid to put your things together, and a sledge is waiting at the door."

Her father's voice checked the child so suddenly that the moment he had spoken he reproached himself for having spoken too strongly.

She left off crying at once, looked up with a pale, resolute face, and went into her own room to get ready for the journey. Then, when the scarlet cloak and hood had been put on by the sympathetic Gretchen, Laura returned and stood once more beside her friend.

"Papa," she said, turning to Maurice, "I'm quite ready, and you may go down now. I shall come presently. Please, I want to say good-bye to mon père alone."

Maurice could not have been more astonished if he had suddenly seen his little daughter put on her womanhood than he was at this calm demand. He even hesitated a moment. But the little one stood her ground.

Laura's instincts had told her what it was that had made her friend so suddenly cold and distant. She could not leave him without *one* more kind word; then, on the other hand, the presence of her father, and his stern forbidding of her ready tears, prevented her from letting her friend see some at least of the love and gratitude that filled her small heart.

Maurice looked at the tiny figure and smiled: "My daughter has her father's will. Well, little one, I suppose I must give in this time. It is natural, perhaps, that you should feel this, only don't be too long about your adieus."

He turned to L'Estrange, thanked him for his kindness to the child, asked if he could do anything for him before he went away; then, when the question had received a decided negative, bade him a courteous farewell.

Once more, and for the last time, the child and the man—the child so near heaven in her simplicity, the man world-weary and travel-stained—were left alone together, and now the little one felt that it was really for the last time.

He turned his face toward her. She threw herself down on her knees by his side, sobbing convulsively. "Mon père," she cried piteously, "is it for ever?"

For a few moments he was silent. In the sorrow of parting from this only creature in the world who purely loved him, the memory of that night when God's peace had been shed abroad in his soul, when the tumult of his heart had been stayed by the consciousness of a presence above and around him, returned to his mind. He was alone and hopeless no longer. "Little one," he answered, drawing her soft cheek to his, "you must look for me there—in heaven."

"I will, I will," answered the sobbing child, for heaven at this moment seemed near and real to her.

She was about to rise, but he drew her down again: "Laura, remember, if I go there ever it will be through thee. My child! my child!"—his voice broke down suddenly—"the great God bless thee, now, every day of thy life, and even for ever!"

A knock at the door; the child's father was becoming impatient. Laura rose, kissed her friend once more, smoothed his bed-clothes as she had been accustomed to do, then turned away, choking back her sobs. The little one could not trust her own father yet. She was afraid he would be angry. She did not dare to look back at the door: she went, and L'Estrange was left alone.

The excitement had been almost too much for him in his weak state. That night L'Estrange thought that he would die. They were very kind and attentive to him in the hotel, did everything that could be done to lighten his sufferings, but all he wished was to be left alone, that he might die in peace. He was mistaken, however, as he had often been before. This stroke did not mean death. A few days after Laura's departure he was able to sit up, a day or two later he was trying to teach his left hand to do the duties of the right, and before a fortnight had passed his friend from Paris had arrived.

Sorely in those days of enforced solitude he had missed his little comforter, but Marie's bright, helpful presence did much toward restoring him. He recovered in time to a certain measure of health and strength, and yet the man was changed.

The spirit that had faced the world's storms, that had made joys for itself wherever fate had thrown him, was broken down. He had no aims, and to begin again his life of wandering seemed desolate beyond measure.

Perhaps his intercourse with Laura, and that parting which had wrung both their hearts, had stung him in this: it had brought before his mind the torment of that "might-have-been" which lurks in the background of pleasure and self-seeking to seize upon the remnant of a wasted life. It was his retribution, the portion he had prepared for himself, but none the less was it bitterly hard to be borne.

L'Estrange never regained his former vigor of body or strength of mind. He spent the rest of his life in wander ing, for no ties held him to any particular place, and he was restless.

He wrote to Margaret as soon as ever he had acquired sufficient power over his left hand (the right remained for some time comparatively helpless). The letter was a pouring out of his heart, a confession of her wrongs. He took no merit to himself for having been instrumental in restoring her to happiness. He only offered this as a proof of his sincerity, he only asked for a line to let him know he was forgiven.

They never met again; indeed, L'Estrange did not live very much longer, but his end was peace.

> "After the burden and heat of the day,
> The starry calm of night."

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEST IS EMPTY.

> The warm sun is failing, the bleak wind is wailing,
> The bare boughs are sighing, the pale flowers are dying,
> And the year
> On the earth, her deathbed, in a shroud of leaves dead,
> Is lying.

One evening—it must have been in the month of November, when the days had grown short and the nights long, when the autumn winds whistled bleakly and the waves were given to lashing the shore—a young girl sat alone at the window of a room which only the red fire and flickering twilight redeemed from total darkness. She was looking out, gazing with dreamy eyes that saw very little of that upon which they were apparently fixed, at the desolation of the world that lay outside. And yet that desolation was writing its impress on her brain, giving to the inner life the images of dreary hopelessness that belonged for the moment to the outer.

The young girl scarcely saw the leafless giants shivering in their nakedness, or the leaden clouds driving restlessly over the sky, or the dark sea moaning, plunging like a mighty thing tied down—a power compelled by a higher power to miserable inaction; yet these things were with and around her; they helped to call that deep look into her eyes, to cause the impatient sigh that escaped her now and then. Inside, there was nothing to disturb her meditation. In the room and in the house was an utter stillness. It was the stillness of watchers engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with man's last and darkest foe. For that struggle had been going on in the little house during three or four long days and nights, and now, at last, a lull had come. The patient slept.

Poor Adèle! It could scarcely be matter for wonder that her cheek looked pale and her blue eyes deep, that impatient sighs broke from her, that she was ready to sympathize with the gray desolation of a winter night. For Adèle had been passing through a time of anxiety such as she had never before experienced.

Margaret dying, Arthur gone—no word, no line to let them know the fate of the wanderers—no possibility of being able to give the sufferer the news for which her soul was craving—nothing in all the here and hereafter but vague uncertainty, but cruel delay.

And Adèle, in the bitterness of her spirit, had begun to doubt about everything. It had been so hard to watch the patient sufferer, to know that in any moment she might be the prey of death—that the pure, noble life, worn away by sorrow, might pass into the invisible without one gleam of light to cheer it on its progress; it had been so hard to listen in the sombre light of the sick room to the passionate ravings of the faithful wife, and to realize the utter impossibility of bringing her that for want of which her life was waning.

These things preyed upon Adèle's mind. In the darkness and solitude, in the suspension of immediate anxiety, her heart sank, her spirit began with itself humanity's dreary questioning.

Everywhere, everywhere—in the angry cries of the young child, in the quiet sorrow of those of riper years, in the patient sadness of the aged, in the pallor of young faces—*it* can be read—the why that rises evermore to Heaven, the great mystery of human woe. Shall it be answered one day? Ah, who can doubt it? Else were we wretched beyond compare.

The *why* was in Adèle's heart that evening, welling up from its innermost depths, proving itself too strong and terrible for her young brain to fathom. And still she sat there, her arms folded and her pale face looking seaward, thinking, thinking.

Once or twice she turned to look at her companion. Margaret was on the sofa. For the first time since that attack of brain-fever which had so terrified her devoted nurses she was dressed, and her dress was of the soft, pale material which Maurice loved.

They had been afraid of the fatigue, for Margaret was very ill. Emotion, anxiety, suspense had told upon her to such a degree that at last her life had been despaired of.

For three days her mind had been wandering. Such strange, pathetic wandering it was that often and often tears had poured down the cheeks of those who watched over her. But early in this evening her senses seemed suddenly to return. There came a light into her eyes; she sat up and looked round her. And then she insisted upon being dressed and taken into the little parlor. They could not refuse her, though the old woman shook her head ominously. "It's well to be seen," she whispered to Adèle, "what the end of it a' will be. Puir leddie!" and she wiped her eyes, "the sair heart hae dune it. Humor her bit fancies, bairnie; 'twill be the same, ony gait."

Weeping in spite of herself, Adèle obeyed the old nurse. They dressed Margaret with minute care, combed the waving hair—short now, alas!—from her white forehead, put on her the trailing lavender-colored dress and the pretty lace ruffles, wrapped the Indian scarf round her shoulders, and laid her down, exhausted but happy, on the parlor sofa.

She thanked them with her gentle smile, gave a sigh of intense contentment; then, after a few moments, fell into a quiet, healthy sleep.

It was this sleep which Adèle had been watching in the dark room until, so quiet and peaceful had been the sleeper's face, the tension on her watcher's nerves was partially relaxed. She turned from that earnest gazing at the pale face, so beautiful in its pure outlines, to look at the outside world—to think and dream and hope. For in the heart of the young hope is ever rampant. It is only when years of experience have shown hope's futility that the radiant companion forsakes the soul. Forsakes! Ah, in thousands of instances scarcely forsakes—rather takes a higher ground, shows a larger prospect. In the dreariness of wintry age hope is still busy, gilding not the transitory *here*, but the lasting beyond.

Adèle had not reached that stage of experience. Her young heart, though ready at times to look forward even to that shadowy beyond, was yet very busy with the *here*, the sweet earthly happiness which all young humanity is earnestly craving.

That evening there seemed very little to feed her persistent hopefulness. Another day and yet another, with no line from Arthur, the consciousness of his devotion, of his thoughtful affection, making his silence the more strange and ominous; winter in its dreary desolation looking in at her from sea and land, telling loudly of the difficulty—even perhaps the danger—of travelling; the life of her friend waning, passing in its miserable famine of all that makes a woman's joy. These were the gloomy thoughts with which the hopefulness of the young soul struggled that evening.

For a few moments they overpowered her. In a dark phalanx rose before her mind tales of sorrow and wrong; pallid faces passed her by, tones of bitter misery rang in her ears. She covered her face with her hands. "They are the many," she cried, "the great multitude! Why should any think to be happy? God help us! for this is a dreary world." The words were spoken half aloud, for in the momentary despair she had forgotten everything but this—the aching of her own heart, the sadness of a hope-forsaken world.

She was aroused by a slight rustling among the leaves outside.

The house was very solitary, and the lonely women had more than once experienced that nervous terror which shudders at a sound and sees an intruder in every shadow. However, they kept nothing of great value in the house, and they had hitherto had no real cause for uneasiness. But Adèle in all her night-terrors had never heard anything so meaning as this stealthy rustling among the branches. She leaped to her feet and peered out into the night. This time she had not been deceived. At the gate there was a vision of fluttering garments. Adèle thought she recognized the form that was passing out into the night. With blanched face and trembling limbs she flew, rather than ran, across the room. It was almost too dark to see, but feeling on hands and knees the young girl discovered, to her horror, that the sofa was empty. Those fluttering garments were Margaret's. An access of fever had come on. In its delirium she had rushed out to meet certain death in the cold and desolate night.

For a moment Adèle was almost paralyzed by this new misfortune—fruit, as she told herself bitterly, of her own carelessness; then gathering her wits rapidly together, she threw a shawl round her head and rushed out in pursuit of the fugitive. She did not even wait to let the landlady and the old nurse know of their patient's flight. Time was the great consideration. Margaret might be stopped and brought back before any serious mischief should have happened.

And thus it came about that the two elder women, who were in the lower part of the house enjoying a cup of tea and a chat, in the pleasant relaxation of that anxiety which had been oppressing them all, knew nothing whatever of the strange commotion, of the mysterious flight of the two younger, for whose safety either of them would have staked her life.

The little parlor was deserted, the red fire flickered and waned, the door of the house stood open, through the dark hall the wind whistled and shrieked; while all the time, outside in the darkness, by the shores of the moaning sea, life and death, reason and madness, love and folly were carrying on their fierce, impatient strife.

Had Adèle waited for one more moment, she might have been startled by another sound. Scarcely had she left the little house, wild with anxiety, to discover and bring back her friend, before there came from the direction opposite to that she had taken the sound of horses' hoofs that echoed through the silent night.

For this was what had been happening in the mean time. A carriage had been driving as rapidly as a very poor horse could take it in the direction of the cottage. Inside it were a young man and a child, neither of whom spoke a word for the intensity of their outlook into the night.

A horseman rode beside them, and at times it seemed as if his impatience could scarcely be restrained, as if it were impossible for him to suit himself to the slow movement of the carriage.

There was a cry at last from the child, which the horseman heard. He half stopped and bent over her, then rose again erect and vigorous, for the little hand had pointed out his goal, and the dark spot, still in the distance, but faintly showing against the background of sea by the solitary lamp that shone before it, was the shrine that held his treasure. A moment, and Maurice Grey was tearing wildly along the road. Would that faint light ever grow nearer? Maurice was wont to say in after years that those minutes spent in rushing through the darkness were the longest he had ever known.

But the longest minutes have an end. The panting horse was drawn up at last before the solitary lamp. Blindly and madly, not thinking of what might become of it, Maurice threw himself from his saddle, burst open the little garden-gate, and trying, but in vain, to steady his trembling nerves, walked up the path.

But as he looked at the cottage his fierce pace slackened, and a sudden horror seized him, for in its dreary solitude it looked like death.

Maurice stopped for a moment. The heart of the strong man, the heart that had borne so much, beat violently. He thought he must have fallen to the ground, but gathering himself together he pressed forward, trying to reassure his coward heart.

"They are in the back part of the house, of course," he muttered. The door of the cottage stood wide open. "Strange," he thought, "on so cold a night!"

Noiselessly the husband, who was a stranger in his wife's house, passed into the little hall, and still that sickening silence, that dreariness of solitude, met him. A faint light glimmered from the remnants of the parlor-fire. He peered into the room; it was dark and seemingly empty. Maurice struck a match and looked round him. The red ashes, the position of the chairs, the tumbled covers, the crushed sofa-pillow, all told of recent occupation; and indeed the two fugitives could scarcely have gone many yards from the house. As he gazed the haggard face relaxed. Crossing to to the sofa, he stooped and pressed his lips to the pillow, for something told him that Margaret's head had been there. But his match died down; he was left again in darkness.

"Was anything stirring," he asked himself, "in this house of death? Where was she the traces of whose presence he was finding in the deserted room?"

He decided to remain there for a moment. It could not but be that before many moments should pass the music of her voice would meet his ears, and then he could discover himself. But waiting met with the same fate as searching. Not a sound, not a breath broke the stillness. It was a strange coincidence. In the very room, by the very spot where the deserted wife, the bereaved mother had thrown herself down, almost lost, even to herself, in her anguish, he stood, he waited, his heart sinking with vague dread, his spirit fainting in its sickening suspense, the man who had deserted her, the husband who had misunderstood, who had lightly judged her.

The first sound which met Maurice's ear was the rattling of the wheels that announced the approach of his companions. He rose and went to the door of the room. Surely this new sound would be heard. In the little hall, on the narrow staircase, he might catch the fluttering of her dress. Before she knew of his coming he might clasp her in his arms.

As the little Laura sprang from the carriage, and danced rather than walked along the path, up the steps, through the hall, the driver rang the outside bell with some violence, and this at last proved effectual. Maurice's hungry ears detected movement, but it came from below. There was the sound of chairs being pushed back, of steps on the lower passages and stairs.

The fact was this: Jane and the old nurse, worn out by nursing and anxiety, having ascertained that Margaret was sleeping calmly, had allowed themselves to be beguiled by the pleasant fumes of tea and the kindly warmth of the kitchen fire into giving way themselves. During Margaret's flight and Adèle's pursuit, during the arrival of Margaret's husband and the subsequent drawing up of the carriage, they had been sleeping, one on each side of the kitchen fire.

Jane was the first to be aroused—the first, that is to say, to gain full possession of her senses, for the violent ringing of the outside bell had startled the old woman so much that at first she scarcely knew where she was. Jane got up at once, straightened her sprightly figure, smoothed her hair and apron and struck a light. "Who in the world may it be?" she muttered indignantly: "I'd be bound it's one of them boys. The mistress just gone off too, and frightening her out of her wits. Them sort hasn't got a spark of feeling about them."

She walked leisurely up the stairs with her candle, and opened the door that led into the hall. She had scarcely done so before a blast of wind sweeping through the hall put it out. In the next moment her arm was seized, she was dragged into the semi-light outside and confronted with Maurice's fierce eyes. For while Jane was preparing herself to answer the importunate bell the child had been up and down; she had opened the door of the different rooms, all well known to her; she had come down trembling and weeping to say that they were dark and empty, and where—where was mamma?

There was reproach in the wailing cry; in her rapid journey, in her enforced separation from L'Estrange, in her weariness, in her childish sorrow, this had been the one consolation: at the end of it she should see her mother, she should rest in her arms. And now, when the end had come, when the home so intensely longed for had been found, the promised remained unfulfilled.

The blow to Laura was all the more cruel that it was utterly unexpected. No sad forebodings had crossed *her* young mind. She had pictured the little parlor and the lighted lamp and her mother's gentle face and open arms, and then the rest in those arms, the telling out of her pent-up woes.

The cottage had been found, but within it was only empty darkness. Laura threw herself down on the sofa, and her wailing cry reached the ears of her father as he dragged the landlady out into the light: "Mamma has gone, and mon père is dead." That and his own disappointment made him almost mad for the moment. Seizing Jane by the shoulder, he shook her roughly as he looked down into her white face: "What have you done with her, woman? Speak, or by Heaven I will make you!"

CHAPTER X.

LAURA AND HER FATHER.

Oh, there is never sorrow of heart
That shall lack a timely end,
If but to God we turn and ask
Of Him to be our Friend.

It was an awful moment for the bewildered landlady. The wildness of the night, the mystery of that empty room, the violence of the disappointed man, brought vividly to her mind that other night when, but for the interposing power of God, her hands might have been imbrued with the ineffaceable stain of crime. It had passed, it had been forgiven, but in this moment, her senses scarcely awake, the suddenness and mystery around her, it seemed almost as if the deed had been done, as if the accuser were before her.

Instead of answering she cowered and shrank, while Maurice in his agony, without ever relaxing that vice-like grasp, repeated his fierce inquiries. "You know; I can read it in your coward face. Great God, give me patience!" And as he spoke he shook her roughly, making the poor woman all the more powerless to utter a word.

Only a few moments had passed, but they seemed ages to them both, before Arthur came out among the trees. His face was very pale, for in the interval the old woman had been telling him all that had happened—at least all she knew. It appeared that they were totally unexpected, for although both Maurice and Arthur had written to announce their arrival, in the uncertainty of the winter-post from Switzerland they had preceded their letters.

The continued suspense after Mrs. Churchill's cheerful presence was withdrawn had been too much for Margaret to bear up against, but her sudden disappearance was as much of a mystery to the old woman as it had been to them; she connected it, however, with her illness, and the conclusions she drew were very gloomy. In the whole circumstance there was only one ray of hope—Margaret's faithful friend was with her, as Adèle was missing too. But how had she allowed her to leave the house? why had she not called for assistance?

Arthur, as he went out to meet the disappointed man, felt hope sink down in his heart. But though pale and sad his face was resolute. It would be necessary to act, and to act at once. Taking Maurice by the arm, he drew away from his grasp the terrified woman. "Mr. Grey," he said, "listen to me. Your wife is out there in the night. Be calm or nothing can be done. My cousin is with her."

Maurice gave a sudden start. "What? how?" he gasped.

"I tell you," replied the younger man, "you *must* command yourself. She has had a dangerous fever; it may be delirium —no one knows. In any case they must be instantly followed. We certainly did not pass them in the direction of the station. Take you the road to the sea; I with Martha will go inland. Mr. Grey, do you hear?" for Maurice was staring wildly about him.

"In the night, by the sea," he muttered, staggering blindly against the wall.

Arthur was in despair. This was worse than all; *how* could he make him understand? But at that very moment help came from an unexpected source. A little soft hand was put into that of the bewildered man, large spiritual eyes looked up into his face. Laura had heard the last words. Her father's emotion had for the first time brought him near to her.

"Dear papa, you will find mamma. Come!"

He submitted to the leading hand, walked with the little one down the garden-path to the gate, outside of which the saddled horse was standing, quietly cropping the wayside grass.

The fearless child caught the bridle and put it into her father's hand. Then first Maurice seemed to understand what was wanted. He took the bridle from the child's hand

and stooped to kiss her on the brow. "Pray for us, Laura," he whispered—"your father and mother."

A moment, and the good horse was spurred forward again, this time on the sandy road that led down to the sea.

Happily, the moon came out from a rent in the clouds.

The child looked up. "He will see mamma," she whispered; then, as the horseman disappeared behind the trees, her strong little heart failed.

She threw herself down on her knees in the wet grass by the garden-gate, and clinging to its posts poured out her sorrow: "O God, save mamma. O God, bring her back to Laura."

It was the landlady who found her there.

After her first terror about the strange events of the evening, Jane vaguely remembered to have caught a glimpse of the little one, and her first thought was to search for her in every direction, for she was alone in the house, Nurse Martha having at once started off with Arthur to look for the wanderers.

She found Laura at last by the garden-gate, and in spite of resistance carried her in to the warm fireside, for, practical in the midst of her excitement, Jane had rekindled the parlor fire, and it was blazing merrily.

"Miss Laura, my dear, think what your mamma will say if you're ill too; and you know you'll be ill if you stay out in the cold."

This made her submit at last to be wrapped up warmly and laid on the parlor sofa. It was well for her. The fatigue and subsequent excitement, the exhaustion of her sorrow, and the pleasant warmth combined to cause a drowsiness that could not be restrained.

Laura forgot all her troubles. While the fate of her parents still trembled in the balance she slept childhood's unbroken sleep, and Jane was set free to run up to her own little charge, who had been aroused by the commotion and was crying out for her lustily.

She found him so excited that as it was impossible to divide herself between parlor and bedroom, she thought it well to wrap him up warmly and bring him down.

The bright fire was as effectual with Willie as it had been with Laura. Jane laid him down on the sofa, and the hard, unsympathetic woman felt her eyes grow dim and her heart soft as she watched the quiet sleep of the little ones—the one round and rosy as the day, the other pale, with a troubled look even in sleep, but fair as one of God's angels.

CHAPTER XI.

UNITED AT LAST.

> One moment these were heard and seen—another
> Past; and the two who stood beneath that night,
> Each only saw or heard or felt the other.

ADÈLE had been swift—swift as the wind. Instinctively in her rapid departure she had chosen their favorite road, that which led down to the sea, but at first it seemed as if all her efforts were destined to be in vain. The fluttering garments had disappeared; on the white road, stretching away into the distance, was no sign of the wanderer.

Choking down the horror which possessed her, the young girl tried to collect her senses. A few moments ago their patient had been sleeping so peacefully that their fears had been set at rest, they had believed her out of danger; now—Adèle was inexperienced, but rapidly in her despair old stories of disease, madness, delirium, unnatural strength crowded in upon her mind.

What if at last the long anguish had destroyed the fair mind? What if a dull horror was to swamp their hopes for ever? If—if— She dared not look this last woe in the face. Impulsively she pressed on, her trembling limbs endowed with a new strength, her young heart breathing out its resolves upon the night: "I will save her—I. Great God, in Thy mercy help me."

She had come to a turn in the road. Rounding it, she made an eager bound forward, for there through the darkness she could distinguish at last the outlines of Margaret's form.

Pressing her hands to her head, Adèle tried to think. If only the old nurse had been with her, or their landlady! How was she to act? how in her single strength to arrest and bring back the fugitive?

Yet there was something in Margaret's gliding movement which made the girl think rather of somnambulism than of delirium. If this should be the cause of her flight Adèle knew that a sudden awakening might possibly be dangerous to health or reason.

Struggling with her terror, trying to come to some right conclusion, she at last reached her friend Close by was a little path which Adèle and Margaret knew well. It led off from the road, through a wilderness of stunted grass and tangled weeds, to the sea.

Here Margaret paused a moment, as if in hesitation. During that moment's pause Adèle looked at her fixedly. The young girl's last suspicion had been true. By the wide-open, sightless eyes, by the groping of the hands, by the soft, continuous murmuring of the lips, she saw her friend was asleep.

Straining her ears, she distinguished through the moaning wind and sobbing sea some of the words that were falling from Margaret's lips. "Which way?" And then groping forward, with that blind, pitiful movement of the hands, "To the sea? Cold, so cold, but," with a smile that made Adèle weep, "Maurice is there."

As she spoke, Margaret turned into the winding path, and Adèle shivered. What awful dream was bewildering her brain?

Throwing her arm gently round the sleeper, she tried to draw her back to the road.

"Maurice is here," she said in a tone as dreamy as her own; "come."

To her intense relief, Margaret obeyed her guidance, the shore was left behind, they were passing on to their quiet home; but the relief was transient. Scarcely had they lost sight of the sea before Margaret stopped—the bewildered look returned to her face—there began that dark, dreary groping of the hands. "I have lost him," she cried in a voice pitiful as a child's wail, and turning once more she pressed forward to the sands with a swift-gliding step. What could the young girl do? In her powerlessness the tears rolled down her face

Her arms were still round her friend, but she did not dare to constrain her. "Margaret," she whispered pleadingly, her lips close to her friend's ear.

Quietly Margaret turned her pale face, over which a strange, sweet smile was beaming. "Coming, my beloved," she answered softly.

They had left the grass and tangled weeds behind them; they were treading the soft yellow sands; behind them was the warm earth, touched by the light of a young crescent moon, set like a silver bow in the parting clouds; before them, dark and hungry, roaring evermore like a monster chained, lay the awful sea.

Adèle groaned. If indeed a conflict were before them, she wished it had taken place above, while those terrible waters were comparatively distant, and Margaret was now pressing forward as though *they* were her goal. "Margaret, my darling! for pity's sake awake!" she cried in her desperation.

But Margaret only answered the voice of her dream. Again came that strange, sweet smile—again her lips moved: "Coming, Maurice, coming." Then, as Adèle with all her force tried to drag her back to the path, "Patience, my beloved!" and as she spoke the young girl felt in her quiet resistance the strength of madness.

Lifting up her heart in a passionate prayer for help to the one Being who seems in these awful moments near and real to weak humanity, Adèle made another effort. "Margaret!" she cried, and the ring of her young voice sounded clear above the tumult of wind and waves—"Margaret, listen to me."

Had she been understood at last? Was the terrible moment over? Certainly her voice had pierced the films of sleep. Into the fixed eyes came a sudden meaning. Margaret shivered, and pausing in her mad flight looked before her wildly. But not yet was the danger over—rather it was prolonged and intensified. The quiet somnambulism had given place to the worst kind of delirium.

With a shriek Margaret threw her hands above her head and tore herself free from the detaining grasp. "Maurice!"

she cried in the strange exaltation of this madness. "I saw him there—they shall keep me from him no longer. Beloved, wait for me; I am coming."

One despairing glance Adèle threw around her; no human being was in sight; she felt numb and powerless, while the frail being, the faint pulsations of whose ebbing life they had been watching through those anxious nights and days, seemed endowed suddenly with a giant's strength. Sobbing convulsively, Adèle threw herself upon Margaret, and seizing her by the waist dragged her backward with all her remaining strength. A moment of struggle; then she felt herself being borne along the sands, her arms still round Margaret, but all her weight as nothing in comparison with this fierce energy of disease. Cooler and damper blew the wind, nearer and nearer came the sound of beating waves; at last the light foam began to sprinkle their faces; yet the faithful girl would not loosen her grasp—rather she would die with her friend.

A moment, and memory, grown acute in the death-agony, showed her pleasant scenes and soft home-pictures, children's faces, blazing fires, fair poetic dreams of beauty and use, Arthur and the to-come which was to have been so bright,—all to pass away for ever in the pitiless suction of those on-creeping waves.

Another moment, and she felt the crawling foam about her; a wave fell thundering even at their feet, throwing over them its cold salt spray; and the young girl moaned. There would still be time to escape, to return to life and its warm beauty. Would she draw back? A thousand times no. In the numbing of every faculty, in the passing away of every joy, that grasp of the slender arms grew only the mightier. She would save her friend if she could. If not, all she had left was to die with her. Like a black cloud that wave hung over them. What delayed its onward sweep? Adèle used to say afterward that it was a miracle, for if it had fallen they were lost, beyond the possibility of salvation.

But while they stood, their feet in the foam and that ominous cloud above them—for Margaret's impetuous rushing had ceased, and Adèle lacked power to drag her backward—there was a shout, a cry. Another of those long moments, and a strong arm was extended; they were drawn on to the dry sands, and even as they stood there shivering the mighty wave fell, sucking back into the watery waste that lay beyond the treacherous foam where their feet had been. Margaret fell back unconscious, while Adèle for the moment scarcely thought either of her or their preserver.

As she felt the solid ground beneath her feet and the cool air around her she fell on her knees. "Saved, saved!" she cried, and the labored hysteric sobs showed how terrible her excitement had been.

But then came other thoughts. Had they escaped the sea only to meet worse dangers? Who was this deliverer? She turned round to look at him. By the light of the moon, which still struggled through the clouds, she was able to see his face. There was about it a wildness that seemed to confirm her worst fears, and his arms were about Margaret—he was gazing into her face.

She did not seem to be aware of it. She was all but inanimate, for, although not alive to the terrible danger of her situation, Margaret had been exhausted by the struggle.

The sight aroused Adèle. Though her knees were trembling under her from fatigue and exhaustion, though her bosom was heaving with sobs that refused to be choked down, the brave little champion had still a work to do. Her friend was helpless; she must defend her.

Adèle got up, and showing a pale but resolute front touched the stranger on the arm. He turned to her with a sudden start and muttered apology for his neglect; he did not seem to have been aware of her presence, and as she caught a nearer view of the dark face, lined with suffering, convulsed with emotion, some suspicion of the truth began to dawn upon her mind.

A flutter of hope, more exciting than all the previous agitation, nearly choked her; the dignified little sentence in which she had intended, while thanking him for his timely assistance, to rebuke his presumption and recall him to a sense of his duty as a man and a gentleman, died away on her lips; she could only stammer out incoherently, "Who are you? For pity's sake tell me!"

The dark eyes which had been scanning the pale calm beauty of Margaret's face were turned on her. "I am her husband," he said simply; his voice trembled, he spoke with difficulty. "And you have saved her," he added softly. But this Adèle scarcely heard. She had turned away. She was passing as fast as her wearied limbs could carry her along the path that led to the road. She would leave them alone together, and—the cottage held her Arthur.

* * *

They were united at last. By the shores of the surging sea, the desolate night around them, they stood together, and at first, so overpowering were the emotions that swept over the man's soul, he could think only of this—that they were together, that she was in his arms, safe from harm and danger—that once more he was gazing into her face—a face so calm and pure that even in this moment Maurice cursed himself for not having understood better the strong purity, the beauty, the loveliness of the soul it revealed.

After the delirium which had so nearly been fatal a great calm had fallen upon Margaret. With the touch of Maurice's hand, with the encircling of his arms, the unrest seemed to have fled. She did not look up, apparently she did not know him; but her eyes closed, her breathing became soft and regular, she lay back in his arms contentedly, like a weary child that has found its resting-place.

In times of intense feeling a life seems to be condensed into a moment. Scarcely more than a moment had Maurice been holding her to his throbbing heart before he recovered from his stupor to a knowledge of the necessity for immediate action.

The winds of the wintry night were beating about his darling. She was ill, unconscious, it might be dying. Her clothes were drenched with the sea-foam that had besprinkled them in their wild flight, her hair, damp with the night vapors, was clinging about her face, the shoes in which she had started from the cottage had been carried out to sea, the delicate lavender dress and soft lace ruffles with which she had adorned herself that she might look fair in the eyes of the husband she had gone out to meet in her delirium, were torn in the struggle that had taken place, were bespattered with mud and sea-sand. It was not in such a plight as this that Margaret had thought of presenting herself to the long-absent. But when does anything in this world correspond with those same dreams and ideas of ours? In Maurice's eyes she was fair—perhaps all the fairer for her weakness. Hastily he took off his fur-lined cloak and wrapped it round her, then he raised her in his arms to carry her up the road.

This time the horse had been tethered. Maurice had caught sight of the light dresses in the moonlight just at the moment when Adèle had succeeded in arousing Margaret from the dangerous sleep, and there had been a moment's hesitation. Totally unprepared for the impetuous rush upon the sea, he had taken the precaution, before following the fugitives on foot, of tying up the horse, that it might be ready for any emergency.

He was glad he had done so, for the emotion of that evening seemed to have affected his physical power. Under the weight of his wife, his recovered treasure, he staggered and almost fell.

Margaret remained unconscious, and Maurice fervently hoped that for the moment she would continue in the same state. He was fearful of the effect upon her mind of a sudden awakening in his arms: but it was not to be. Just as they reached the point of junction between the path and high-road a faint tremor convulsed her; she opened her eyes and turned them on the dark face that was stooping over her.

Maurice was afraid the delirium was about to return; but gazing at her anxiously he saw, to his astonishment, that there was no bewilderment in her eyes; only, as she met her husband's gaze, she glided from his arms, and before he knew what she meant to do she was kneeling at his feet on the moonlit road. Her hands were clasped, her pale face looked haggard in its earnestness. "Maurice! Maurice, forgive me!" she cried.

At the sight of her husband the memory of that one moment of weakness had flashed over her soul with such a bitter force that until his forgiveness had been gained, she could not forgive herself.

But Maurice! If an angel had knelt to him he could scarcely have been more astonished. In his agitation he seized her almost roughly, and raising her from the ground pressed her once more to his breast, while the hot tears fell on her face and neck.

"Margaret, you will kill me! Beloved, it is I who should kneel—I who should make my life one long repentance."

Then she twined her arms about his neck and laid her head upon his shoulder, but she was not altogether satisfied. To the craving of her weakness his answer was like an evasion: she persisted in her demand: "You are good to me, dear, but you have not answered. Tell me, tell me! Is my miserable folly forgiven?"

"Margaret, for pity's sake—" he began.

But she stopped him, and in her look and tone there was some of the wildness of disease. "I see how it is," she moaned; "he is too kind to say it, but I know my folly was beyond forgiveness. Have I not felt it? O God! O God! pity!" Her voice sank into a moan. Her head fell heavily on her breast: she began to cry plaintively, like a child that has been crossed in its whim.

They were close now to the spot where the horse had been tethered; the moon shone brightly above them; their dark shadows made a blot on the whiteness of the moonlit road. Maurice paused a moment, and the drops of agony stood on his brow.

He felt the urgent necessity for getting her home with as little delay as possible, but in the state in which she was he dared not put her out of his arms. He bowed his head over her till his cheek touched hers: "Be comforted, my wife, my own—mine now and for ever. Forgive you?—yes, yes." And then looking up he turned his pale face to the skies, as if calling Heaven for a witness to his extremity: "I have forgiven her—I who wronged her, who tortured her, who vexed her pure soul by mistrust! God preserve my reason!"

But Margaret took his answer to her heart. She smiled again, the wildness left her eyes, and a deep, restful calm took its place. She said no more, but for the first time since their meeting by the waters she pressed her lips to his.

Without demur she allowed him to lift her into the saddle and to support her with his one hand, while with the other he took the bridle and led the horse at a quick walk to the city tage, which was about half a mile distant from the little path that led down to the sea.

Before they had gone very far Margaret had relapsed into total unconsciousness, and Maurice was obliged to mount the horse himself, taking her before him on the saddle.

Meanwhile, Adèle had reached the cottage, just in time to stop Arthur and the old nurse from starting on another fruitless search.

As the horse with its double burden paced along the road, she and her cousin, their arms lovingly intertwined, stood at the gate of the cottage-garden waiting for its approach out of the shadows. They were together and alone—Nurse Martha and the landlady being busy indoors, making everything ready in Margaret's room, for the young girl had told her tale of horrors, and they feared it would be impossible for Margaret to survive so much.

But Adèle had seen her calm face, and she answered the doleful prophecies of the nurses by a smile: "You'll see, nurse; our Margaret will soon be better now."

They had been extremely anxious to seize the young girl, after her breathless entry and thrilling tale, and put her to bed as an invalid, but Adèle decidedly refused submission. The sight of Arthur was like a tonic to her trembling nerves. She would only allow her poor little wet feet to be dried and warmed by the parlor fire, close to which the children were still sleeping, and her wet clothes to be changed. As to shutting herself out from Arthur when she had just found him, it was simply cruel to ask it.

She was the heroine of the moment, for although her own tale had barely done justice to the self-forgetfulness with which that terrible struggle had been conducted, they yet heard enough to know that in her faithful devotion she had risked her own life, and Arthur, the old woman, the landlady looked upon the young girl with a new respect.

"What did you think of, Adèle," asked her cousin as, wrapped up warmly, she stood clinging to him by the garden-gate—"what did you think of when that ugly wave was so close to you?" Doubtless, Arthur knew what the answer would be. Of course the heroine had thought about her hero. How could it possibly have been otherwise?

"Dear," she replied softly, and the ready tears flowed down her cheeks, "I thought of you, and how miserable and lonely you would be. Margaret gone, and—and—"

"My Adèle gone," he said very softly, filling up the pause.

And then—ah yes—and then all kinds of foolish things no doubt were said and done, for these young people were, as it will be seen, very young, and what is more very much in love; and as we all know the kind of things, perhaps it is scarcely necessary to put them down in black and white.

Black and white is not the dress for lovers' nothings, especially the sweet almost childish nothings that would flow from lips like Adèle's and Arthur's. They should be written in such colors as the blushing east can give, inscribed by the pen of one of God's angels.

For young as Adèle and Arthur were, they knew what they were doing. They had passed through the hand of the Great Instructor, so terrible in His aspect, so wise, even loving, in His ways of dealing with weak humanity. In the furnace of suffering their hearts had been tried, and they knew how to value their happiness, how to prize one another.

CHAPTER XII.

A LONG SLEEP.

O wind!
If winter comes, can spring be far behind?

Everything was ready in Margaret's room—warm blankets, steaming cans of water, hot fomentations, cordials of many a different kind—for her nurses were afraid that the unconsciousness of which Adèle had spoken might, after her previous excitement, be very difficult to conquer. They were surprised, then, when Maurice at last carried her in and laid her down, to find that she bore every appearance of being wrapped in a quiet, healthy sleep; indeed, so convinced was her husband that this, and this only, was the cause of her unconsciousness, that he would allow no means to be used for her restoration, at least until the morning, when the doctor from the neighboring town had already promised to look in upon them.

Nurse Martha shook her head. There was something mysterious about it all. "Who ever heard," she asked Jane in whispers, "of a body sleeping awa' that gait, and she in a dangerous fever that had wellnigh ta'en her life?"

But in spite of protest Maurice's wishes were obeyed. Margaret's wet things were removed as quietly as possible by the experienced old woman, and she only stirred once during the process. Her husband watched her sleep that night. Kindly but peremptorily he sent every one away, and sat himself by his wife's side, counting the very pulsations of her heart as the hours of the night passed by. The old nurse and the landlady (they had insisted upon sending the younger people to bed) watched by turns during the night in the little parlor adjoining the bedroom, for neither of them had much belief in the efficiency of this new care-taker. But no sound came from the room where the husband was watching the death-like repose of her he had wronged and deserted, the woman who was suffering, as he told himself bitterly, for his uncomprehending folly. Once or twice during that long watch he grew alarmed, the rest was so deep; but putting his ear to her heart he heard the pulsations, faint yet regular, and he was comforted.

So the night went by, and in the morning he could no longer keep his treasure to himself; they would all come in to know how she was, to watch and wonder. The little Laura was the first to creep into the room. She had been told on the preceding night that her mother had been found, but was too ill to see her—that she would doubtless be better in the morning. Submitting to the inevitable had become a habit with Laura. She had allowed herself to be undressed and put to bed, but very early, in night-dress and bare toes, she made a voyage of discovery to find out where her mamma could be.

When, as she softly opened the door of Margaret's room, the little child saw her father sitting dressed on a chair by the bedside, and her mother, so white and silent, in the bed, she stopped suddenly, trembling from head to foot. Laura had heard of death, though she had never seen it, and this solemn hush, this silent watching, struck like a chill upon her heart; she turned very pale, and seemed half afraid to cross the room, but her father called her: "Mamma is asleep, darling; come here and see her." He took her up and laid her down on the bed beside Margaret, telling her to be very still. Laura scarcely required the warning. She crept close to her mother. The strange child could not have spoken at that moment, she was so absolutely content. And Maurice had to turn away from her searching gaze; he would not have his child see that tears were gathering in his eyes at the sight of them together—the mother and child united one to the other, given back to his arms.

But still that sleep went on, and all but Maurice grew uneasy. The doctor came in at a tolerably early hour, but went away again after giving utterance to a few commonplaces. It was evident that he was puzzled. He asked repeatedly whether any narcotic had been given to her, and when he was answered in the negative shook his head ominously. She had better, he said, be left to herself; it might possibly be dangerous to arouse her. Nature in some cases was the best guide; he would call again.

The hours of the day passed by—morning, noon, evening, and still Maurice watched, and still he hoped, while still there was no cessation of that death-like trance. Evening passed into night, and all but Maurice gave up hope. They were allowed to come into the room and share the watch, for there was not one in the little house who did not enter deeply into the anxiety. The night deepened, and still no sign of life from the sleeper. Adèle's cheeks became pale and her eyes red with frequent weeping; this seemed so desolate an ending to their hopes and anxieties. On the child's young face the shadow deepened. She had found her mother, but that mother was deaf to her little one's voice, unconscious even of her presence; the old nurse's gestures grew more and more mysterious, only Maurice retained his quiet confidence.

The hours of the night passed by; none of them would go to bed. If those eyes were ever again to open, each one wished to be the first to hear the joyful news. The night waned, and even Maurice grew restless. His face resumed the old haggard look; oftener and oftener he applied to her lips the testing mirror, which still at each trial gave the answering dimness. The night passed into morning, the night-lamp showed a yellow flame, the white dawn began to struggle with the darkness; only Laura and her father were in the room. The child was watching her mother's face, Maurice had turned away to draw up the blind; perhaps the breaking of the morning-light might arouse the sleeper; they were afraid as yet to use stronger means. Suddenly the child gave a cry. He looked hastily at the bed; Margaret was in the same position. There was the same death-like immobility of face, the same rigidity of attitude.

But Laura's eyes were rapt and eager. "Mamma moved, she will soon awake," she cried, and before her father could stop her she had danced out of the room to proclaim the joyful news.

Adèle was dozing on the parlor sofa, Arthur was pacing the room restlessly. He saw the light in the little one's eyes and stopped. Laura to Arthur was a kind of prophet, a superior being.

"Mamma will soon awake," she said, and passed on to tell the old nurse, who was in the kitchen preparing restoratives of various kinds, for she had made up her mind that some means would have to be used to break this death-like sleep.

Adèle had heard the child's voice. She started from the sofa. "Let us go to her," she cried, and Arthur and she went into the room together.

They were joined after a few moments by the child, the nurse, the landlady, all eager to find the happy news confirmed.

The child was right. Margaret was certainly waking The death-like stillness had gone from her face, her hands moved, she sighed now and then.

Maurice hung over her, breathless in his anxiety; he would meet her first glance. Adèle and Arthur stood together at the foot of the bed; the child had crept on to it, and lay very silent close beside her mother. It seemed a long time that they waited there together, but when the end came it was like a shock to them all.

A shiver convulsed her, her eyelids quivered; slowly she raised them, and first fixed her eyes upon her husband, then looked in a bewildered, half-frightened way about the room.

Maurice raised her on his arm. "Margaret," he whispered, and she looked at him again.

"Is it morning?" she asked, and when he had answered in the affirmative, "I knew it would come," she said, then lay silent, smiling calmly.

Evidently as yet she did not know where she was, and Maurice was perplexed.

Adèle came to the rescue. Motioning to him to give up his place, she stooped over her friend. "Margaret darling," she whispered, "Maurice has come, and little Laura and Arthur."

The familiar face and well-known voice seemed to arouse her. "It is not a dream, then," she said. "No," for the little Laura's clasping arms were about her neck, "my child is here, and Maurice; I thought I saw him last night and that he forgave me. Was it true, Adèle?"

Her voice sank, for she was very weak, but the old nurse came forward with a cordial, which restored her so much that her mind began gradually to take in all that had happened.

Later in the day they dressed her and laid her down once more on the parlor sofa. Until then she had not spoken much, she had been in a quiet, passive state, but with the familiar surroundings a full sense of the reality of her dream-like happiness seemed to come to her. The first person for whom she asked was Arthur.

In his boyish timidity he had vanished as soon as ever he had become certain that she was really awake. Adèle found him and brought him into the room. Margaret held out her hand. "How can I ever thank you, my best, my most untiring friend?" she said.

And then—for he seemed as if he did not know how to answer—she drew Adèle toward her and joined their hands.

"You will be happy," she said smiling—"perhaps all the happier for this. Maurice"—he was sitting close beside her, his arm round her shoulders—"we shall be happier too, for if God will we shall understand better." Her voice sank, she looked dreamily over the sea: "Morning is all the fairer for the black night that goes before. Dear, we should thank Him even for our darkness."

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